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WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

MAY BELL

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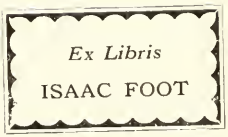
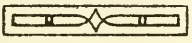


WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

AND OTHER SKETCHES.

By

MAY BELL.



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BRITANNIA GOES TO WAR.

PERSONS:

MALE: PRUSSIA
BELGIUM *(a boy)*
SCOTLAND
INDIA
A MOSLEM
A BRITISH GENERAL

FEMALE: BRITANNIA
AUSTRIA
IRELAND
CANADA
AUSTRALIA
NEW ZEALAND
NEWFOUNDLAND
EGYPT
CEYLON
SOUTH AFRICA

BRITISH TROOPS, WITH AMBULANCE CORPS, etc.

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BRITANNIA GOES TO WAR.

The curtain rises on Prussia, a hulking swaggering figure, splendidly uniformed, brooding alone.

Prussia: The hour has come. Long have I worked and waited for this day, the day when I might stir up strife and come into mine own as conquerer of Europe—ay! of the world.

It is no mean nor petty ambition that swells my breast. I will conquer the world; crush, and grind it to powder, for its own ultimate good. I will trample earth's people in the dust only that I may raise them up to my standard of right, my ideal of what culture should be.

For 2,000 years Europe has lain under a spell. We have bred up weaklings, we have pampered infirmities, we have allowed women and children to creep into the notice of our high thinkers, and stooped from our vast designs to give help to cripples.

All this must change. Instead of weakness we must breed strength. We must trample out the weak, the maimed, and the suffering, that these things may cease on the earth. Might and strength, and power over the things that we can see and handle, these are all that it is worth while to have.

Women must go back to the slavehood Nature meant for them. I could break a woman as I could break a stick. Why should I not?

Might is right, and power is to the strong. That must be remembered. And so, only so, shall we breed up a race of Supermen: triumphant, magnificent brutes, ranging where they will; trampling and lusting

unrestrained, with all the glory of the earth focussed upon them; and so this material world shall have reached its comsummation. And I, Germany, am the Chosen of God to point out this way!

My day has dawned—that day that I have worked for, planned for: scheming in the air like an eagle, and working underground with the skill and cunning of a mole. Now I am ready. I will put all to the test. World-power or downfall! . . . Austria!

Enter Austria, a female figure with a double eagle on her head).

Austria: Did you call me, brother?

Prussia: I did. Go forth and stir up war. I would conquer the world.

Austria: I will, brother. I will knock down, Servia who is small and cannot hurt me. But if Russia, who is kin to Servia, should come to avenge her little relation, will you protect me?

Prussia: Yes, yes. You need have no fears. Go, stir me up strife. Go!

(Austria curtseys and goes out to the east).

Prussia: (reflectively:) Now will I overthrow France.

(He turns to go out westward, but finds Belgium, a boy in blouse and sabots, blocking his path.)

Prussia: Hallo! So you are there. I am on my way to overrun your neighbour, but I won't do any harm to you if you let me pass.

Belgium: I will not let you pass.

Prussia: (With contemptuous astonishment.) What? Don't be a fool, boy. What is your neighbour to you? She is bigger than you are. Let her fight her own battles. Give me room to pass.

Belgium: I will not let you pass.

Prussia: Do as I bid, or I will break you in pieces and cast you out like refuse. My wrath is very terrible. Beware of it!

Belgium: (Going up to him and producing a slip of paper) You can't hurt me. You promised me that you wouldn't hurt me, but would be my friend. Look there. You signed that paper yourself.

Prussia: Bah! a scrap of paper.

(He takes it, looks at it contemptously, and tears it up.)

Belgium : That was your pledged word !

Prussia : Pledges are nothing when a strong man is on the road to conquest. My philosophers have taught me that.

Belgium : Then I'll trust in the God we used to have before your philosophers forgot him !

Prussia : Stop your cackle ! (Seizes Belgium by the collar and shakes him.) Will you let me pass ?

Belgium : No, I will not ! (Calls :) France, arm yourself ! I will hold the bully while you make ready.

(Flings his arms round Prussia's waist and tries to wrestle with him. Prussia roughly loosens his arms and holds them.)

Prussia : Fool, to pit your infantile strength against mine ! For the last time, will you let me go through ?

Belgium : No ! No ! No !

(He struggles against Prussia, who exerts all his brutal, full-grown strength, shaking the boy unmercifully, and finally getting him down and beating his head on the ground.)

Belgium : (Calls in the midst of struggling) England, England ! I am in terrible trouble ! Help me, England !

Prussia : (With a scornful laugh) You'll get no help ! You are too small to be worth bothering about. England shall watch you being crushed off the face of the earth.

(He pulls the boy up as roughly as he bore him down, and forces him out with every kind of merciless ill-usage.)

Belgium : (Desperately, as they go out) England ! England ! Help, oh, help !

(The stage is empty. From behind, strains of the Marseillaise and the Russian National Anthem are heard through shouting and the din of battle. Now and again comes Belgium's cries for help.

(Britannia enters from the north, her head erect, and a sword at her side.)

Britannia : Hark !

(While she listens the din continues, but ceases when she begins to speak.)

'Tis the noise of battle. Through the peaceful commerce of Europe, vicious pride hath upraised his head : pride in brute strength and material power and all the primitive violence that we have striven for centuries to

assuage. We have striven to be men, not brutes, and with all our weakness and failings, we still are, and will be, men.

Now must I unsheathe my sword.

(She hesitates with her hand on the hilt.)

The ground of Europe is wet with blood, and the sky black with suffering. Must I drag my children into this?

(From the distance comes a cry of "Help, England, help!" Britannia draws her sword and holds it high.)

'Tis done. Go to your deaths, my children. When the helpless call, we hear!

(From the north comes in Scotland, as a strange and ancient Highlander. He takes Britannia's hand in both of his, and shakes it.)

Scotland: Sister, when we were rivals, neither could conquer the other. Now we are as much at one as the two eyes in one head.

(Ireland, a graceful girl in veiling green draperies, with large, dark eyes, runs in from the left, kneeling and clasping Britannia's knees.)

Ireland: Sister, my darling, we were all but quarrelling until this hour came. But you know that I am all yours when there is trouble to be faced, for my heart is warm as my lips are quick.

Britannia: Little sister of the troubled land! O sweet and dim-eyed little sister!

(Tenderly raises Ireland, who flings her arms around her and kisses her impulsively. The three stand together in a corner of the stage.)

Scotland: Hark, they come!

Britannia: The lads who have played on our fields and mountains are going to die.

Ireland: Their mothers, their sweethearts and their wives are sending them.

(From the distance come strains of "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," which grow louder as troops in khaki come in from the north singing it.)

Officer in Charge: Halt! Right Wheel! To Belgium's Help!

(Troops march out to the west, and go through in a long

procession singing "Tipperary," which they vary now and then by "Have a banana," and an occasional jocose remark.)

Soldiers: Don't wait up for me if I'm late for supper!
What price a first class return to Berlin?
Don't knock the old Kaiser's head off till we get there!

(They are followed by the ambulance corps, with stretcher-bearers, etc. When all have gone, and "Tipperary" has died away):

Britannia (Coming forward to the centre): These are not all. From the ends of the earth I hear them stirring. My children of the far countries have heard my call and are coming to my aid. Hark to the tramp of great armies marching by!

(Ireland and Scotland join Britannia. Canada comes in as a splendid young woman. She is followed by a Red Indian bowed under a great sack of fruit and produce.)

Canada: Hail, Mother! I am Canada, richest and eldest of thy daughters. I have sent armies at thy call, and lest thou shouldst hunger I have brought thee a million sacks of grain from my wheatfields, with other gifts too numerous to mention. For I am thy eldest daughter, Mother.

Britannia: Well hast thou done, O Canada. Take thy place beside us.

(Enter Australia):

Australia: Mother, I have heard thy call from overseas, in the island where I dwell under the seven stars. We are full of business in the new countries. There are deserts to be planted, flocks to be tended, children to be reared. But, at thy call, all other calls are silenced. I have brought thee a million carcases of sheep; I have sent thee my navy and my fighting men, and I will plant thy flag on the little islands round about.

Britannia: We thank thee, Australia.

(Enter New Zealand.)

New Zealand: Hail, Mother! These many years I have lain quietly, watching my own growth. Now, take my sons. They are few, and we shall miss them; but all we have is thine.

Britannia: We thank thee, New Zealand.

(Enter Newfoundland.)

Newfoundland: I am Newfoundland. I have brought thee of my fish, and am also come to offer my services.

Britannia: We thank thee, Newfoundland.

(Enter India, a richly dressed native Prince.)

India: Hail, Empress! I come from that far country that is Queen of the East, older than history, rich beyond knowledge. I come to offer you all that my people have, their armies, their horses, their wealth, and even the jewels that they wear.

Britannia: Rise, India, who hast also become my son.

(Enter three others, a Moslem, Egypt, and Ceylon.)

Moslem: I come to offer the allegiance of all the Moslems over whom you rule.

Egypt: I bring the loyalty of Egypt.

Ceylon: And I the fealty of Ceylon.

Britannia: I thank you again, and yet again. Well have ye rallied to my aid, O children; and I am moved almost beyond speaking. But surely there is one still missing. Does South Africa lag behind?

Australia: She does but tarry to make peace in her own household. This I know, for I passed her on my way.

(Enter South Africa.

South Africa: Great Motherland, I come! If I have seemed to linger it was because thy motherhood is yet half new to me, and my bosom is still rent with the pangs that have made me one. But the oath that I have sworn to thee I will keep. I am bringing thee mealies, fruit, and eggs, such as I have, and my sword—this new sword that I have forged, awaits thy bidding,

Britannia: I need thy sword, South Africa. I have work for thee to do in a land of drought and desert, full of hardships and without glory.

South Africa: It is no light task for my young shoulders, and I do not yet see the end thereof. But because it is thy word, O Mother, the order shall be obeyed. So soon as I have stilled the tumult in mine own house I will do thy bidding, yea, though my yearning women give every man they have.

Britannia: We thank thee, South Africa.

Scotland : And now, hearken all of ye to the battle beyond the skyline, where we must go. Our allies are gathered together. France, Russia, Belgium, Poland, Servia, Montenegro and Japan are fighting together against the eagles that tear at the heart of the world.

Britannia : We go to join them. Keep high your hearts, my children. and together we will show the nations that England stands for right, and right is might. Together we will wade through carnage and unspeakeable suffering and sacrifice. And we will gaze at the dread beauty in the face of God's most terrible scourge and minister,—that chastening angel whom men call War. Unsheath your swords !

(All draw.)

Now comes the dark upon us !

(Darkness. The curtain falls, to rise again immediately.)

Britannia sings : "When Britain first at Heaven's command," etc. The rest join in the chorus.

THE CULPRIT.

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT.

PERSONS :

MR. BRASSEY

CATHLEEN

WILLIAM

A MAID

The scene happens to be laid in Johannesburg.

TIME :— The present day..

SCENE : Mr. Brassey's study, the comfortably furnished room of a wealthy man. At the back are two windows ; on the left (as one looks at the stage) is a large writing desk ; and there is a door in the right wall. To the right is a small table holding magazines and framed photographs. In the right wall further back than the door is a fire-place with a mirror above it.

The wall-paper is expensive and richly coloured, the pictures are large photogravures in dark frames, the chairs are all solid and comfortable looking.

The time is dusk on a winter afternoon, and Mr. Brassey is standing with his back to the audience looking out of the window. He is a big, middle-aged man with a square chin.

A knock at the door, which is repeated before he hears.

Brassey : Come in.

(Enter the maid)

Maid : There's a young lady to see you, sir.

Brassey : What ?

Maid : A young lady, sir.

Brassey : What on earth have I got to do with a young lady ?

Maid : I don't know, sir. May I pull down the blinds ?

Brassey : Yes, pull down the blinds, and turn on the light.

(The maid proceeds to do so)

Brassey : What sort of a young woman is she ? What does she want ? Begging for some charity, I suppose, eh ?

Maid : I don't know, sir.

Brassey : Well, you ought to know. You'd never keep a place in an office if you can't spot these begging women at once. What's she like ?

Maid : She's a lady, sir. You can see that. But dressed very shabby. I wouldn't like to be seen walking out in a dress as shabby as what she's got on. Shall I show her in, sir ?

Brassey : I suppose so.

(Telephone bell rings)

Wait !—(speaking down telephone) Yes, I did ask for 1347. Disengaged at last, eh ? Give them to me, then. (To maid) Show her in, but wait a couple of minutes. I must telephone first.

Maid : Yes, sir. And if you please, sir, cook asked me to ask if those gentlemen are coming to dinner ?

Brassey : No. I'll be alone, as usual.

Maid : Very good, sir.

(She goes out)

Brassey : Hallo ! Are you there ? hallo ! Are you the detective department ?—put me through to the chief. Hallo ! . . . Brassey here. What about that forgery business ? Have you done anything about it yet ? . . . Well it's about time you did get a clue . . . a woman, eh?—you *think* it's a woman. Well, I don't care if it's man, woman or child . . . Prosecute ! of course I mean to prosecute. What am I taking all this trouble for ? Do you think I'm getting up a picnic ? Very well, then.

You'd better ring me up about it later.

(He puts down receiver. Maid looks in, then opens the door for Cathleen, who comes in with a half-frightened air. She is poorly dressed, but piquante, with pretty hair, pretty dimples and a pretty voice.)

Brassey : Well, young lady ?

Cathleen : Are you Mr. Brassey ?

Brassey : That's my name. Will you be good enough to tell me yours ?

Cathleen : I don't think it matters.

Brassey : I think it does.

Cathleen : I'll tell it you afterwards. I promise I'll tell it you afterwards. There's something else I must tell you first.

Brassey : As you please. Will you sit down ?

Cathleen : No. I'd rather stand.

Brassey : Well, do you mind if I take a chair ?

Cathleen : Not a bit.

Brassey : What have you come about ? Business ?

Cathleen : Yes. In a sort of way.

Brassey : Well ?

Cathleen : I don't know whether you've found it out—I dare-say you haven't noticed—but somebody has forged your name on a cheque for £100.

Brassey : Yes, I have noticed it.

Cathleen : It's dreadful, isn't it ?

Brassey : Have you come to me on behalf of the person who did it ?

Cathleen : (Hesitatingly) Yes.

Brassey : Then you may go back and say that I've put the matter into the hands of the police, the detectives are on their track, and they'll be caught in a day or two. I've just had a 'phone message through from the C.I.D. saying they were following up a certain clue. Well, we all know the C.I.D. At the same time a certain clue sounds pretty safe. I give them two days at most, in case the forger lives at the other end of the town. You or I would probably have him safe in half an hour. And when I say "him" I should of course say "her."

Cathleen : Why "her ?"

Brassey : Won't you change your mind and take a chair ?

Cathleen : Thank you.

(She sits down)

Brassey : Well, because these C.I.D. fellows have discovered that it's a woman.

Cathleen : They must be awfully clever.

Brassey : I've no doubt they must seem so to the friends of the guilty person. There's a difference in the point of view. Look here, what did you hope to gain by coming to see me ?

Cathleen : Nothing. I came to confess. It was me.

Brassey : I thought as much.

Cathleen : Why ? Do I look like a forger ?

Brassey : Evidently—So when you found the detectives were after you and the game was up, you came to throw yourself on my mercy ?

Cathleen : Not a bit. I didn't know they were after me. I didn't think you would have discovered it so soon. I came because—you see my husband found out what I had done, and he was so angry with me. He said it was almost as bad as stealing.

Brassey : It is stealing, called by another name.

Cathleen : Well, I prefer it not called stealing. But Will went off without forgiving me, and we've never quarrelled before. I didn't see what I could do but come and confess to you. I'm awfully sorry, really, but you've got such heaps of money I didn't think you'd miss it.

Brassey : Do you know who was the first thief in the world's history ?

Cathleen : No, unless it was Cain.

Brassey : Neither do I, but he made just the excuse that you did. Now do you know what I'm going to do ?

Cathleen : No.

Brassey : I'm going to ring up the police station and hand you over to the police. I wonder what's the number of the nearest station ?

(Picks up book)

Cathleen : You aren't really going to, are you ?

Brassey : Of course I am. You'll find that I've got no mercy where thieves and forgers are concerned.

Cathleen : Will they send me to prison ?

Brassey : Very probably.

Cathleen : But what will my husband do ?

Brassey : He should have kept you in better order.

Cathleen : He couldn't. He was ill. That's why I did it. He was desperately ill, and we hadn't money to buy anything with, not even food. Wouldn't you feel ready to rob a church if the person you loved best was dying and you couldn't give them medicine ?

Brassey : 2773.

(Puts down the book)

Cathleen : (Leaning forward and laying her hand on his) Mr. Brassey, I hadn't even food to give him.

Brassey : That was unfortunate.

(He picks up the receiver)

Hello ! 2773. Well, give them to me as soon as they are disengaged.

Cathleen : Please don't ring them up, Mr. Brassey. I'm not an ordinary criminal, you know. I've been very carefully brought up, and I'm very young. I don't think I could bear to go to prison.

Brassey : You were not too young to forge my name apparently. Though how you did it beats me.

(Telephone bell rings)

Cathleen : I'll show you how I did it. Make the telephone wait, and I'll show you. Don't you want to see ?

Brassey : (Down the receiver) Hello ! . . . Well, I'm busy now. They must wait.

Cathleen : I've always been good at forging people's names. It's a dreadful talent to have. It's such a temptation.

Brassey : (Handing her pen and paper). Forge my name on that.

(She sits in his chair, facing the door, and writes. He stands on the opposite side of the desk watching her. When she has finished she gives him the paper.)

Brassey : H'm That would be enough to convict you in any court of law. But I'm not mean enough to use it against you.

(Tears up paper and throws it in the waste-paper basket)

Cathleen : Then are you going to let me off ?

Brassey : Certainly not. I've already told you what I am going to do.

Cathleen : If you'll wait just a little while, I promise you that we'll pay all the money back.

Brassey : What salary does your husband get ? Enough to live on ?

Cathleen : (Whimsically troubled) Almost !

Brassey : Then how do you propose to pay me back ? Not that it matters, for I've already told you what steps I mean to take.

(He goes round the desk to the telephone, but she is before him, and puts her hands on the receiver)

Cathleen : Wait a minute. Just one minute, please, before you 'phone.

Brassey : I warn you that its no use you trying to get round me. I'm perfectly hardened to the blandishments of your sex.

Cathleen : Oh ! everybody knows what a hard man you are.

Brassey : Do they ? What do you know about it ?

Cathleen : I know that's why you live all alone in this great house. I know that you quarrelled with your only son and cast him off.

Brassey : He chose to go against my wishes, and that's the end of him so far as I'm concerned. I don't allow my will to be crossed. What's it got to do with you ?

Cathleen : They say that you don't even know if he's alive or dead.

Brassey : If they say that again, tell them that I always read the obituary notices. Do you mind allowing me to use the telephone, please ?

(She retreats)

Brassey : (Down the telephone) Hello !

Cathleen : You know it was only for £100, Mr. Brassey.

Brassey : A forgery is a forgery.

Cathleen : Then I wish I had made it £1,000. It would have been just as easy.

Brassey : (Down the telephone) 2773

Cathleen : Well, if Suffragettes can go to prison for pleasure, I suppose I needn't mind.

Brassey : Is that the police station ? Brassey here. William

Brassey. Send a constable round to my house at once. You know my house? —— Yes . . . Yes.

(Puts down receiver)

Cathleen: Do you mind if I use your 'phone?

Brassey: Not in the least.

Cathleen: Hallo! hallo! hallo! These girls are a nuisance, aren't they? Oh! is that the exchange? 905 please . . . Is that 905? Oh! can I speak to the junior clerk please? . . . his wife . . . Thank you . . . Oh! Will, is that you? I'm in his house . . . Mr. Brassey's. I know, dear, but I had to come. I told him all about it and he's going to send me to prison. Will, dear, come round quickly—quick as you can—and save me . . . Yes, dear. You will come quickly, won't you? You must get here before the policeman. I'm not afraid! I'm alright as long as I've got you . . . Goodbye, dear . . . Yes.

Brassey: So now, I suppose, you think that's alright?

Cathleen: Yes, I can trust Will.

Brassey: I pin my faith to the law. And now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to lock you up in here and leave you till the constable arrives.

Cathleen: You know, really, for a business man— !

Brassey; What is it?

Cathleen: The windows fasten on the inside!

Brassey: You'll find my dog chained up outside the windows.

Cathleen: That nice big creature I made friends with in the hall?

Brassey: Very well, I've no alternative but to remain here. Please excuse my writing a letter. There are some magazines on that table.

Cathleen: (Sitting down) Thank you.

(She remains quietly watching him. A pause)

Brassey: (Indicating the table with his pen). You'll find the latest *Strand* there.

Cathleen: Thanks. I don't want to read. But I won't look at you if it embarrasses you.

Brassey: What do you mean?

Cathleen: Nothing. Only I thought you seemed to be a little—ashamed of yourself.

Brassey : I'm nothing of the sort.

Cathleen : It's such a nuisance being really firm-willed. One has to go through with a thing even after one has begun to disapprove of it oneself. I know, because my husband's like that. It's really pathetic sometimes, seeing him try to change his mind.

Brassey : Will you allow me to finish my letter ?

Cathleen : Oh ! of course. I thought you were only pretending to write, so's not to have to talk to me. May I walk round and look at things ? . . . So you still keep his photograph ?

Brassey : Whose ?

Cathleen : Your son's. It is your son's, I suppose ? You're very like him. It's funny how often fathers are like their sons.

Brassey : It's not a subject that I care to discuss.

Cathleen : I was just thinking—heavens—I might have been your daughter !

Brassey : Then you'd have had the nonsense well thrashed out of you in your youth.

Cathleen : Is that the way you brought up your son ?

Brassey : I wish I had. (Thumping his fist on the desk) I wish to the Lord I had !

Cathleen : Why ?

Brassey : If the pig-headed young fool had had the least respect for my wishes . . . ha! it's nothing to do with you.

Cathleen : Then you miss him ?

Brassey : Certainly not. He may go to the devil for all I care. Probably has. . . What's it got to do with you ? Do you know him ?

Cathleen : A little. Of course if you'd really cared for him you wouldn't have tried to prevent his marrying the girl he loved.

Brassey : Was he of an age to marry ? Or a position to marry ?

Cathleen : They say that his income was sufficient till you turned him out of your office.

Brassey : What do you know about it ?

Cathleen : I know that when you're young and poor is the happiest time of your lives if you love one another. I

know that, because my husband is poor, and he and I were too happy for words till he got ill. Even now, even if you send me to prison, we belong to each other. So you were trying to do your son out of just the most beautiful thing in the world,

Brassey : The young fool chose to marry beneath him and he can go to the devil in his own way.

Cathleen : Do you know that's the second time you've used bad language in front of me.

Brassey : Oh ! (very brusquely) I apologise.

Cathleen : It's all right. I don't mind except that it doesn't show respect. How do you know that he married beneath him? Have you ever seen his wife?

Brassey : Once for all, I'm not going to discuss the matter.

Cathleen : (listening) Will's rather long, isn't he?

Brassey : So's the constable.

Cathleen : Thank goodness.

(She goes over to the mirror)

Cathleen : Mr. Brassey !

Brassey : Well?

Cathleen : I do think you might have told me that my hat's all crooked.

Brassey : I didn't see anything wrong with it.

Cathleen : (taking the pins out). It's rather a becoming hat, isn't it? I trimmed it myself, and it cost me exactly four shillings.

(She takes it off)

Brassey : I'm glad that you can use your fingers in more ways than one.

Cathleen : Oh ! I can cook and sew and before I married I could typewrite. Mr. Brassey, do you know anything about prisons?

Brassey : Not much.

Cathleen : Will they shave my hair off ?

Brassey : Possibly.

Cathleen : Oh dear ! What shall I do? Will does admire it so.

Brassey : I expect it's all curled up with curlers.

Cathleen : Oh ! no it's not. The wave's quite natural. It's rather pretty hair, don't you think?

Brassey : (gazing at her) I'm no judge.
Cathleen : Oh ! but all men are.
Brassey : Do you mind letting me finish this letter ?
Cathleen : Very well . . . (she puts on her hat again) Mr. Brassey !
Brassey : Yes.
Cathleen : Don't you think it's very hard that when a person does wrong, all the people who love them should be punished too ? If you send me to prison, it will break my husband's heart.
Brassey : That's his look out.
Cathleen : Oh, I'm not trying to persuade you to change your mind. Of course I know you can't do that ! But I just want you to agree with me that it's hard. I haven't got any near relations, but think of Will's. He's got a father who's getting old, and is awfully proud, and Will himself is as proud as Lucifer. It must be a sort of disgrace to them if I'm put in prison.
Brassey : You should have considered all this before. I can't help it.
Cathleen : (Leaning close against the desk and looking across it at him) I should have thought you would have sympathised with proud, hard people. My husband's father is—very like you. Can't you feel for him at all ? Haven't you any pity ?
Brassey : Now do me the favour, young woman, to consider the position. You choose to make a fool of yourself by marrying another young fool, as penniless as you are. He gets ill. Well, that was only what you might have expected. The chances were that it would have been you ; that it would have been a baby.
Cathleen : Well ?
Brassey : You were destitute ; no food, no medicine. How could you expect food or medicine without money to pay for them ? You were simply reaping the fruits of your own folly. And then you steal my money to put right the position your foolishness created.
Cathleen : Well ?
Brassey : Well ? It's all your own fault, don't you understand ? You're only getting what you asked for. You

were fools and you must accept the situation.

Cathleen : We might have refused love. In that case we should have had enough to eat and drink and clothe ourselves with, but would that have satisfied us if we went lonely and undeveloped all our lives? Is that what you would have had us do, Mr. Brassey?

Brassey : Love is no use without a balance at the bank.

Cathleen : (Sitting on his desk) We have been married for a year and as poor as we could be, but if there were never to be any more happiness for me, my life would have been worth living. Oh! you can't understand. Love makes the world all coloured. Tell me! isn't it bitter to be lonely?

Brassey : Sometimes, perhaps. But you see your very pleasant year has to be paid for rather unpleasantly.

Cathleen : Oh! Love is never at its best when things go smoothly. Trouble improves it. I'm quite ready to go to prison if you want me to—Do you?

Brassey : You think you've got round me, do you? You think that I'm to be talked over as easily as a boy? By Jove! I'll show you that I am not. You women are all alike. Always wheedling and coaxing to get out of the consequences of your own actions. Well we'll see which is the stronger, my will or your cajolery.

(A knock at the door)

Brassey : (Sternly) Come in.

(Enter the maid)

Maid : (Rather nervously) If you please, sir, there's someone to see you.

Cathleen : Oh! it's not the policeman?

Brassey : If it's the constable, send him in at once, Louisa.

Maid : No, sir, it's—it's Mr. William.

Brassey : Confound his impudence! Didn't I tell you he was never to enter this house again?

Maid : Yes, sir. But you know what Mr. William is, sir. He was that quick, I couldn't keep him out.

Brassey : Tell him I refuse to see him. He can go.

Maid : Yes, sir. I'll tell him. But he said he didn't care what you said, sir, he was going to come in.

Brassey : Turn him out.

Maid : Very good, sir. Though Mr. William is that strong.
(Exit maid)

Cathleen : He doesn't want to see you. He has come to see me.

Brassey : What do you mean ?

Cathleen : You see, he's my husband.

Brassey : My son your husband ?

Cathleen : Yes—I know I should have told you, but—

Brassey : (Incensed) Don't think I'm going to let it make any difference.

(Enter William, poorly dressed and emaciated)

William : Cathleen, I've come. Don't you be afraid, old girl. I'll take care of you.

Brassey : What do you mean by coming here against my express orders ?

William : I've only come to take my wife away. I've a perfect right to be where she is.

Brassey : Don't try heroics with me, young man. What have you been doing to yourself ? You look as if you had been exhumed from the grave.

Cathleen : He has been very nearly dead. He was ill for weeks.

William : That's of no interest to him.

Brassey : Isn't it ?

Cathleen : Will, dear ! (whispers to him) Do try and be more conciliating, for my sake.

William : Well, I'll try.

Brassey : Why didn't you let me know that you were ill ? You must be a fool if you didn't know that I would have helped you had I known you were in want.

William : I only knew that you said perfectly distinctly that you never wished to see or hear of me again.

Brassey : Then why are you here now ?

William : I have only come to get my wife out of your clutches.

Cathleen : (nestling against him on the other side) : What about conciliation, Will ?

William : Oh ! I forgot—Of course I should have remembered that you were in a rage when you said that.

Brassey ; I was nothing of the sort.

William : I should have made allowances.

Brassey : Allowances ! Let me tell you, sir, that I'll have no more of your confounded impudence !

Cathleen : Don't quarrel ! (to Brassey) It's all my fault, I know ; are you dreadfully angry with me, Mr. Brassey ?

William : It's no use talking to him, Cathleen. You can see for yourself that he wont listen to reason.

Cathleen : You're both so dreadfully strong-willed. What did you do when you lived in the same house ?

Brassey : (drily) Quarrelled.

Cathleen : Do you know what you wanted ? Simply a third person to keep the peace between you—nothing else.

Brassey : You think two's bad company, eh ?

William : (handing her a reticle) Cathleen, this is your bag, isn't it ? Come along home, now. It's no use waiting here longer. It's just wasting one's breath.

Brassey : Not so fast, young man. Your wife has forged my name, and I'm waiting for the constable to arrest her.

William : We'll pay you the money back.

Brassey : You can't, you're not in a position to do so, and if you were, I don't propose to compound a felony. You can go with pleasure, but your wife doesn't stir from this house. Sit down, if you please, young woman.

William : You can't be serious.

Brassey : I am perfectly serious.

William : She is my wife and your own daughter-in-law.

Brassey : I told you not to marry her.

William : Good heavens !

Cathleen : Will, you needn't worry. It will be alright.

William : No, hang it all, Cathleen. You've got us into the dickens of a mess. I've told you the sort of man my father was. You might have been more careful.

Cathleen : I hadn't the least idea what sort of man your father was till I came and met him.

(Smiles brightly at Mr. Brassey, who avoids her eye. The maid knocks and enters).

Maid : There's a policeman here, sir, wishes to see you.

William : Send him away.

Brassey : You will do nothing of the sort, Louisa.

William : Wait a moment, then. (Opens door and speaks

to the policeman). Good evening. Just wait a moment, will you? Mr. Brassey's engaged. Louisa! go and talk to him—keep him amused.

Maid: Oh I can't, Mr. William. I've got my table to lay.

William: Never mind the table. You go and amuse him. He's quite a nice-looking fellow.

Maid: Yes, he seems a nice chap, Mr. William. Oh!—well then.

(goes out)

William: Now, will you allow me to take my wife away from here, or will you not?

Brassey: Does it always take so long for an idea to enter his brain, Mrs. Brassey?

William: Don't play with me, father. I warn you to be careful. Look here! She's a child. She's only twenty. She's been delicately brought up. I know that you stick at nothing, but do you honestly mean to send her to prison?

Brassey: (Grimly) I do.

William: You let her come with me at once or I'll shoot you dead!

(Whips out a revolver)

Cathleen: Will, keep cool for heaven's sake! Say it goes off.

William: It will go off, unless he gives in.

Cathleen: Give me that revolver.

William: Mind away.

Brassey: If you think I'm to be turned from my purpose by threats, young man, you're mistaken.

(He calmly studies a scrap of paper)

William: I'll do more than threaten. Unless you swear to let her go, I'll shoot.

Cathleen: Will, you can't shoot your own father. It's patricide.

William: Shut up, Cathleen.

Brassey: Don't lose your manners in your excitement, William.

Cathleen: Will, you were rude to me.

William: I'm sorry, old girl.

Cathleen: Then don't stand flourishing that revolver. It looks so silly.

William : Oh ! I suppose I'm a fool. But after all it was for your sake.

Cathleen : I know, dearest. But it isn't necessary. He's not going to send me to prison. He never intended to.

William : How do you know ?

Cathleen : Can't you see that he's just longing to make it up ?

Brassey : You appear to know a good deal about my intentions, young woman.

Cathleen : Yes. Do you think I should really have taken it so calmly if I'd thought you were going to send me to prison ? I should have tried my hardest to persuade you not to.

Brassey : Indeed !

Cathleen : Yes ; now look here, why pretend to be so hard-hearted when all the time you rather like me ? You do, don't you ? You did from the first, didn't you ?

Brassey : Go on—take your William and go.

Cathleen : I don't want to go yet. You're so absurdly like William. He never can admit when he's changed his mind.

William : Come along, Cathleen. You'll only make him angry.

Cathleen : (To Brassey) Shall I go or stay ?

Brassey : You can do as you please.

Cathleen : I think I would rather stay, but not unless you want me. And of course, William would have to stay too.

Brassey : Please don't sit on my desk.

Cathleen : (Continuing to sit there) What a pity that you've never had any daughters. You'd have had them sitting round on all your desks and things, and it would have been so good for you. You know you're so like William, and I love him so, that I can't help liking you a little.

(Slips round to his side)

Brassey : God bless you, my dear—and confound you for an artful little minx. Don't think I can't see through you.

Cathleen : (Sits on his knee) I'm glad you've got the same sort of nose as he has. I adore his nose.

Brassey : You'd better not start adoring mine.

Cathleen : Make it up with him. You know, he's feeling rather hurt and unhappy, and he was so ill.

Brassey : (Rising) William !—I don't think the Brasseys ever apologise, do they ?

William : We don't seem to indulge in it much.

Brassey : I suppose there has been fault on both sides, but I confess that I can't see any on mine.

William : Nor I on mine.

Brassey : And if the same circumstances were to arise again, I should behave in exactly the same way.

William : And so should I. Precisely.

Brassey : Still, making allowances for your youth—

William : I was trying to remember, sir, that you're getting old.

Cathleen : Oh ! don't quarrel again.

Brassey : My dear child ! I consider that I've made him rather a handsome apology.

William : And I'll accept it—in that spirit.

Brassey : Very well—shake hands.

(They shake hands)

Brassey : Well, I'll go and send that constable about his business. You'll both stay to dinner, of course ?

William : Thanks.

Cathleen : Are you sure there'll be enough dinner ? Men never think of these things.

Brassey : Oh ! sure to be.

Cathleen : Don't we shake hands, too ?

(He shakes hands, draws her to him and kisses her on the forehead. Hesitates what to say, then :)

Brassey : You should have brought her to see me before, William.

(Exit)

William : (Hotly) Isn't that just like him ?

Cathleen : Yes, he's just like you !

William : Rot !—I say, Cathleen, you are a little brick ! You've made it up between us and I didn't think the breach could ever be healed.

(Takes her in his arms and kisses her)

Cathleen : Are you glad ?

William : Yes. After all, you know, he is my father.

Cathleen : (Submitting to his embrace) Will, you've got your tie tied all wrong again. Let me do it. When will you learn how to tie a tie ? Truly, I don't know what you'd do without me !

William : Neither do I.

(Curtain goes down on Cathleen tying his tie)

WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT.

PERSONS:

ROGER ENFIELD.
REV. JAMES MELKSHAM.
CYRUS (an old servant).
CHARLOTTE (a phantom).

SCENE: An isolated farmhouse on the moors.

TIME: Somewhere in the Eighteen-thirties.

SCENE: A large and gloomy room, half kitchen, half parlour, with a fire burning on the hearth to the left (as one looks at the stage). At the back is a great, bolted, double door; to the right of it a curtained window. In the right wall are two doors, the further one communicating with the upstairs rooms, the nearer with the kitchen proper. Between these doors is a huge, oak dresser, filled with shining pewter.

Facing the fire, Roger Enfield sits brooding in a big grandfather's chair. He is a tall man, rather gaunt but with a heavy frame. Behind him, as he sits, is a small solid table with drawers. Further to the right is a larger table covered with a cloth and the remains of supper.

There is a knock at the outer door. Enfield glances in that direction, but takes no furthur notice, though the knocking is repeated at intervals, till it becomes very loud and prolonged. Then he rises, stands with his back to the fireplace, and glowers at the door.

Enfield : Curse your infernal row !

(Cyrus comes shuffling in from the kitchen).

Cyrus : Master !—sounds like somebody knocking at the door.

Enfield : Do you think I'm deaf ?

Cyrus : Bean't you going to let him in ?

Enfield : Not till I choose.

(Cyrus goes to the window and peers out.)

Cyrus It's a man. He's going round to the back. I hear his footsteps.

Enfield : Haven't you locked the side-gate ?

Cyrus : Ay, it's locked right enough.

Enfield : Then he can't get round.

Cyrus : Master, it's not a night to leave a dog outside. There's heavy snow a-falling, and the wind's like a knife.

Enfield : That's his business. What's he doing out on a night like this ? (The knocking is heard again.) There ! let him in. (Enfield rises. Cyrus opens the door and admits the Rev. James Melksham, whose heavy coat is thickly sprinkled with snow. Enfield leans against the mantelpiece with his back towards them.)

Melksham : Thank you. I began to think your house was deserted, and my imagination responsible for the cheerful glow in your windows. What a relief to be out of the wind !—I presume that is your master ?

Cyrus : Ay.

Melksham : (To Enfield) Good evening, sir.

Enfield : (With a half glance round) Good evening.

Melksham : I must apologise for trespassing upon you, but I've lost my way in the snow. Could you give me shelter while the storm lasts ? (He pulls off his gloves and rubs his half-frozen hands.)

Enfield : It may last all through to-morrow and the next night.

Melksham : I sincerely hope not. But I'm afraid it's

impossible for me to go on while it rages like this.

Enfield : So I must make you free of my house for the night, eh ? Is that your reasoning !

Melksham : I'm afraid it amounts to that. If I could possibly get home I should not trouble you, but the snow is falling so heavily that I could not see my way even before night came on. (Enfield makes no remark. Cyrus bolts the door) Do you mind if I remove my coat ? It's soaked through . . . I'm sorry to sprinkle the snow over your floor. (To Cyrus) Perhaps you would be good enough to dry this for me in the kitchen ?

Cyrus : (Collecting the used plates, knife, fork, etc., from the supper-table) Hang it over that chair ! 'Twill dry of itself.

Melksham : Thank you. I am obliged. (He hangs his coat over a chair, and removes stray snowflakes from his person with a handkerchief.)

Cyrus : Master, shall I get him summat to eat ?

Enfield : Do you want supper ?

Melksham : I wish I could refuse politely, but I'm hungry as a hunter. To tell the truth, I should be most grateful for something to eat.

Enfield : See to it, Cyrus. (Cyrus goes out)

Melksham : I've been wandering through the snow for five hours, and am pretty near exhausted . . . Have you any objection to my coming closer to the fire ?

Enfield : None. (Without offering to make room)

Melksham : (Taking a seat on the hearth and warming his hands) What a comforting blaze !—It seems like heaven to be out of that wind. (Enfield gets up and moves away. Cyrus comes in with a tray, the contents of which he disposes on the table.)

Cyrus : I suppose bread and cheese will do for him ?

Enfield : I suppose so.

Melksham : Admirably, thank you. There's no better fare for a hungry man. And now that I've established a little feeling in my limbs, I can fall to with greater relish. (Goes to the table and takes a chair.)

Cyrus : Must I bring him a mug of beer ?

Enfield : If he wants it.

Melksham : Thank you. If it's not too much trouble.

Cyrus : (Muttering to himself as he goes out) Trouble? That it is, I'll be bound. Darn ye and your troubles.

Melksham : (After his first few mouthfuls) How the wind can blow over these moors of yours. I do not remember a wilder night.

Enfield : Then you must be a stranger here, for this is very customary weather.

Melksham : I have but lately come to these parts. Indeed, I have no idea where I am at the present moment. I could not more completely have lost my way.

Enfield : What were you doing out on a night like this? I cannot imagine any sane man being abroad in this snow.

Melksham : I was called across the moor to visit a dying man, and as I was coming back the storm came on. In no time I was completely lost.

Enfield : And so you felt entitled to force your company on me?

Melksham : (Laying down his knife) You may take it as a fact that if I could go on I should not stay here.—Perhaps you could lend me a man with a lantern to guide me home through the snow? I would pay him handsomely.

Enfield : It would matter little what you paid him. You would both be dead before morning.

Melksham : That being the case, I am afraid I must stay here; and we must make the best of it. (Goes on with his supper.)

Enfield : Look you!—I don't know your name, and I don't want to.—Since I am forced to, I will give you shelter; but I'm a plain man, and I don't like company—and if you don't like my manners, you must put up with them.

Melksham : I will. There's a good deal of necessity in the case, all round. (A short silence. Then Cyrus brings in a mug of beer and puts it on the table.) Thanks. (Cyrus grunts, and goes out. Again a short silence.)

Enfield : (Turning suddenly in his chair) Hark! did you hear that?

Melksham : What?

Enfield : A cry—like a child's cry in the dark. (He goes to the window, draws the curtains, opens the casement a little way, and peers out.)

Melksham : Surely it could not be a child on a night like this ?

Enfield : (Closing the window) I did not think it was a child. I have heard it often before. I wondered whether you could hear it. You say you heard nothing ?

Melksham : Nothing.—If it had been anything supernatural—

Enfield : (His impatience veiling a kind of uneasiness) Supernatural ! What the devil do you mean ? Surely you don't believe such stuff ?—What made you say that ?

Melksham : I really hardly know. Something in your voice, I suppose. But if it had been anything of the kind I should have heard it, for I'm a seventh child, and have had second sight from my babyhood.

Enfield : I wish you joy of it.

Melksham : It isn't a gift to be grateful for, I assure you. I have no wish to pry into the secrets of the tomb.

Enfield : Haven't you ? I have—there we differ.

Melksham : We differ in a good many ways, it would seem. But I've finished my supper, and thank you for it. And now I'm afraid I must ask you whether you have any place where I could sleep ?

Enfield : (calling) Cyrus ! . . . Cyrus !

Cyrus : Did you call ?

Enfield : I did. Is there a bedchamber ready ?

Cyrus : I suppose so. What do you call ready.

Enfield : Are there blankets on the bed, you fool ?

Cyrus : Ay, there's blankets.

Enfield : Then take this gentleman up there, and see him safely bestowed.

Melksham : Thank you—Good-night.

Enfield : Good-night and goodbye. If you are down before me in the morning, Cyrus will give you some coffee and you can go. Unless the storm continues. Then, I suppose you must stay.

Melksham : I hope for both our sakes that it will have abated.

(Cyrus, candle in hand, is holding open the staircase door. Melksham goes through.)

Cyrus : Mind the stairs. (Goes out after him. Their footsteps are heard ascending the stairs. Enfield strides over to the staircase door, opens it, and calls)

Enfield : Cyrus !

Cyrus : (From a distance) Yes, master ?

Enfield : What room are you putting him in ?

Cyrus : (Calling) The room at the end of the passage.

(Enfield closes the door)

Enfield : (To himself) Oh !—What difference does it make?

(He moves restlessly about the room ; kicks some obstacle out of the way ; snuffs the candle ; then puts more wood on the fire, and sits down before it. Cyrus' footsteps are heard descending the stairs. He comes in.) You put him in that low-browed room with iron bars to the window ?

Cyrus : Ay. Why should I not ?

Enfield : No reason. It's cold as Hades, but what of that ? I slept in that room as a boy—And I hate it.

Cyrus : There's a bed in it. (Goes into the kitchen and comes back with a tray on which he puts all the supper things) 'Tis not often that we have visitors here.

Enfield : This is once too often.

Cyrus : (With a senile chuckle) He says to me, he says, "Is your master mad ?"

Enfield : What did you say ?

Cyrus : "Not more mad than this old house," says I. (Chuckles.)

Enfield : You should have said, Not so mad as to get lost in a snow storm and intrude on other people.

Cyrus : (His tray ready piled). Now, I suppose, you're going to sit up there till long past midnight ?

Enfield : What's it got to do with you how long I choose to sit here, hang you ? Be off to your kitchen !

Cyrus : Ay, I'll get me to bed. (Mutters to himself :) Visitors, humph. What's visitors got to do with him and me ?

(Cyrus carries the tray out, and shuts the kitchen door. Enfield leans forward and gazes despondently into the fire. Suddenly he starts round more violently than before.)

Enfield : (Quickly). Yes ! (He rises, looks eagerly round as though expecting to see someone, muttering :) I could

have sworn there was somebody !—(Seeing nothing, he resumes his seat. A deep-toned clock chimes the hour. A pause. Then, from the distance comes a wild yell. Enfield rises to his feet, Cyrus comes in from the kitchen. A door bangs in the distance, and footsteps are heard running down the stairs.)

Cyrus : What's that noise ! Did ye hear it, master ?

Enfield : That fool upstairs, I suppose.

(Enter Melksham, pale, partly undressed, and carrying his outer garments.)

Enfield : What's the matter ? Why do you make this infernal noise ? Can't you keep quiet in the middle of the night ?

Melksham : Why didn't you tell me that this house of yours is haunted ?

Enfield : Haunted ? What do you mean ?

Melksham : You know, well enough. (To Cyrus.) And you know, who put me in the haunted chamber.

Enfield : There's no room in the house, haunted. Cyrus have you ever seen a ghost here ?

Cyrus : No.

Enfield : Nor I. And I have lived here, man and boy, for forty years. You've been dreaming.

Melksham : I hadn't time to fall asleep. I tell you that room's haunted, and nothing will induce me to enter it again ; so I must ask you to let me spend the rest of the night in here. (Puts on the clothes he has been carrying.)

Enfield : This is absurd ! How can there be ghosts walking in my house and I not know it ? Come, speak, what sort of a spectre do you make it ?

Melksham : The ghost of a young girl, flinging herself against the window-panes, and crying to be let in.

Enfield : The branch of a tree scraping against the glass.

Melksham : Perhaps. But no sooner did I lay me down on the bed, than in she comes, and goes wandering round the room ; and not only did I see her, but hear her, for she was wailing all the time : ' Roger, Roger.'

Cyrus : D'ye hear that, master ? (To Melksham) His name's Roger.

Enfield : He knows that, you fool.

Melksham : I did not know it. I'd never heard the name till this girl—thing went moaning it about.

Enfield : Strange—a girl, you say ? What sort of a girl ?

Melksham : A wild, passionate, black-haired, young creature, but deathly pale—pale all over : her clothes pale, too. Yet she stood as clear in the moonlight as you stand there now.

Enfield : This becomes interesting. Did you hear the description, Cyrus ? Well, what more ? You say you heard her speak ?

Melksham : Yes. She called herself Charlotte.

Cyrus : (startled.) What ?

Enfield : How dare you ? This grows past a joke ! You've been listening to old wives' gossip—that's plain enough to see ; and have come here to play off this tale on me. Oh ! it's a fine trick—a fine, manly trick. You wished to see what I should say, I suppose ; and how I should look—that you might go back and tell them that sent you. Go then, and say that I laughed ! (He does not manage a laugh.)

Melksham : I've been listening to no gossip. I hardly know a soul in this countryside. I told you just now simply what I saw and heard.

Enfield : (controlling himself) Go on.

Melkshem : No. I don't choose to be called a liar.

Enfield : You must finish now that you've got so far. You say that you saw this girl—wild, black hair, didn't you say ?

Melksham : Yes.

Cyrus : That's her.

Enfield : Be quiet, you fool !—That you heard—that she wandered about and wailed—wailed ! what do you mean by that ? She was used to demand things imperiously.

Melksham : She went about the room with a low, moaning cry, " Roger, Roger "—just like that.

Enfield : Do you mark that, Cyrus ?—But how did you know that her name was—that ?

Melksham : Charlotte ?

Enfield : (under his breath) Hang you !

Melksham : Well, she came up to the bed, and began finger-

ing about the pillow—the thought of her chills my blood even now. I yelled out 'Who's there?' 'It's Charlotte Roger,' she wailed 'It's Charlotte.' Then she put her hand on mine, and I couldn't feel the touch, except for its chill. I started up with my hair on end, and was down those stairs in a twinkling, with no thought for my neck.

Enfield: Give me that candle. I'm going up to see.

Cyrus: Shall I come with you?

Enfield: No, I'm going alone. Hang this grease! its spilling over everything. (He goes out.)

Cyrus: He'll see nothing. If there'd been ghosts, he'd 'a' seen them before. What did ye say?—A wild, trolloping, ill-tempered hussy, did ye not?

Melksham: I said "wild."

Cyrus: 'Tis she, sure enough. (Sniggers and nods his head wisely.) 'Twould be but natural. (In a different tone.) 'Tis the first I've heard of any ghosts. He won't be pleased with you raking up these ghosts.

Melksham: I can't help that. (Makes himself comfortable before the fire.)

Cyrus: And, see here, better not ask him any questions.

Melksham: I'm not likely to.

Cyrus: He's not mad but he's violent. Very violent in his moods, he is. (goes back to the kitchen. A pause.)

Charlotte: (without) Roger! Roger!

Melksham: (starting up) There it is again!

(The ghost of Charlotte flings itself against the window)

Charlotte: Let me in! Oh let me come in!

Melksham: No, I will not let you in. (hastens to window and draws curtain across. Going towards staircase door.) Roger!—Whatever—you—call—yourself! Come down!

(The ghost of Charlotte glides in through the wall and stands quite still behind him.)

Melksham: Ah! (With his hand on the staircase door, he forces himself to turn and face the apparition.) Who and what are you? Speak!

Charlotte: It is very cold in the grave.

Melksham: I suppose it must be.

Charlotte: Deadly cold. (she does not seem to see what

she is looking at, and has a fluttering way of standing, as though at any moment she might rise in the air or fade away.)

Melksham : Poor creature !

Charlotte : It is vast, so vast ! And dark : there is no light anywhere.

Melksham : Why doesn't the man come down ? (calls up the stairs) : Roger !

Charlotte : (Going close and speaking like a plaintive child.) I can't find Roger !

Melksham : (Throwing open the door) : He's up those stairs.

Charlotte : I can't find Roger. (she goes towards the kitchen, calling) : Roger ! Roger ! (The door opens before she gets to it, and she goes into the kitchen, but comes out again almost at once, still calling) : Roger !

Melksham : I tell you Roger's upstairs. (He leaves the staircase door open, and moves away to the centre of the room. Charlotte goes to the door, which shuts before her. She moves her hands over it as though trying vainly to open it, then turns towards Melksham) :

Charlotte : Is there no Roger ?

Melksham : You'll find him through that door.

Charlotte : There is no Roger in the grave. (She moves away from the door saying) : There is no Roger. (When she comes to where Melksham is standing, she pauses to say to him) : If you find Roger, tell him that I have been looking for him these 15 years. (Melksham goes quickly towards the staircase door.)

Charlotte : (In a low moaning voice) : Roger ! Oh, Roger. I can't find Roger !

Melksham : (Turning in the doorway to look at her, exclaims): Wretched creature, what sins are on your soul that you walk thus in the night ?

Charlotte : Hark ! do you hear that ? 'Tis the sound of a horse galloping.

Melksham : There is nothing to be heard but the wild voice of the wind.

Charlotte : (With increasing fright :) He is coming. It is he ! it is he !—Roger, you must come and help me. I am here alone !

Melksham : Who is coming ?

Charlotte : Roger, help me . . . If he comes—If he comes—(She draws herself up with an air of having made up her mind to some deadly purpose, then suddenly shrieks)—Stop him ! Stop him ! keep him out ! (Rushes swiftly to the outer door and flings herself against it with outstretched arms. Both leaves of the door open inwards, in spite of her arms, and with a wail she goes through into the night. Melksham takes out a handkerchief and mops his brow. Enfield comes back.)

Enfield : (Putting the candle down on the table.) There's nobody, and nothing, there. I've searched and called till my brain reels. Either you've been dreaming, or else you've trumped up this tale to play it off on me, as I thought first.

Melksham : Think as you please. I'm going to make myself comfortable here for the night. (Seats himself by the fire.)

Enfield : If I thought that I would—

Melksham : Then you don't really think that ?

Enfield : At least tell me this. How much do you know about me ?

Melksham : I know that you're a cynical, unfriendly churl, and that I've learned this evening. I'd never so much as heard of you till I crossed your unlucky threshhold to-night, nor of your daughter either.

Enfield : My—daughter.

Melksham : Your wife.—This apparition.

Enfield : She was not my wife. She was never in any way mine.

Melksham : I beg you pardon. I was not trying to find out the relationship ; but, as you see, I know nothing about her.

Enfield : Then you must have seen her . . . Great Heaven !

Melksham : I have seen her twice—a female figure, as clear and distinct as you are now. There was nothing but the unearthly light about her, and the chill that she sent through me, to betray that she was not of this world.

Enfield : You have seen her : actually seen her . . . You say that you've seen her twice ?

Melksham : Yes. She came in here while you were upstairs.

Enfield : In here? Then tell me, if you can, why should you see her and not I, when it is because of me that she cannot rest?

Melksham : I told you that I've got second sight.

Enfield : I have often fancied that if I turned quickly I should see her, or that I could feel her yearning for me —but when I turned round she was never there. And you, a stranger, have seen her twice! (Calls): Charlotte! is this treating me fairly? (To Melksham): How did she look?

Melksham : Pale and unhappy.

Enfield : Of course she did. She is wanting me as I want her. There has never been a time when anyone else counted with either of us.—But wailing . . . wailing!— that's unlike her. Do you think that death—the mere fact of death—could have broken her courage?

Melksham : That's impossible to say. She did not look to me like one happy beyond the grave.

Enfield : Tell me all that happened when she came in here.

Melksham : She went about calling and seeking, I suppose, for you.

Enfield : Yes, for me.

Melksham : Then she seemed to hear a sound of horses approaching, and took fright that someone was coming through that door.

Enfield : Ah! Yes. Did he come in?

Melksham : No, I saw no one. She flung herself against the door to keep him out, and then disappeared.

Enfield : 'Twas her husband.—They tricked her, and he tricked her, into marrying him. Think of it! . . . She was almost afraid of him. He almost broke her spirit. There came a time when she could stand it no longer, and she ran away from him—all across the moors, alone —to me. And on that night, of all nights in the year, I was away. I do not go into town for months and months on end, but I was away that night when she needed me.

Melksham : She called to you for help.

Enfield : Did she? I like to think that. She was too proud to have asked help from anyone but me.—He followed her and found her here before I got back.

You say that she heard his horses and was afraid? I do not believe that. She was afraid of nothing.—She may have learnt fear now. I do not know what they may have done to her since she left us all those years ago.

Melksham: You say that he found her here?

Enfield: Yes. It was in this room. I don't know what they said; he tried to drag her back with him—the brute!—but she seized my pistol from that drawer and shot herself.

Melksham: Dead?

Enfield: She did not die till I came back. She could not have died without me. (Takes a pistol from a drawer in the small table) This is the pistol.

(The ghost of Charlotte glides in through the outer door)

Melksham: Hush!—don't you see?—Can you see nothing?

Enfield: No. Where?—What is it?

Melksham: She has come in, there, through that door!—perhaps as she came on that day to find you—

Enfield: Is there no devil that will open my eyes?

Melksham: She is looking for you.

Enfield: What does she want? Can I help her?—Must I always fail her?

Melksham: There!

Enfield: Why can you see her and not I? Charlotte, where are you?

Melksham: Take my hand. Now, look!—there!

Enfield: (His excitement subdued) Charlotte!

Charlotte: (Seeing him at the same time, and standing still) Roger!

Enfield: How my eyes have hungered for you!—the first time for fifteen years. You are the same. Your eyes are less bright. You have suffered—Ah!—Charlotte, you have suffered and I have known nothing, shut up in this—oh! in this— . . . Charlotte, speak to me.

Charlotte: Roger!

Enfield: Can I touch you? I must! I must hold you in my arms.

Charlotte: (Impelled back as he advances) No! no! keep back. You will drive me out.

Enfield: There's so much to ask you. Did you feel my

agony as your last breath died on my cheek? Why did you give me no sign? Were you mocking at me? You were always a mocking creature.

Charlotte: Could you not have kept me alive?

Enfield: No, I couldn't. I swear I couldn't,—Charlotte! (He rushes at her, but with a wail she goes before him out through the door. He stops at the door: it is bolted. He calls again): Charlotte! (Then he draws the bolts and rushes out after her.)

Melksham: Come back! You'll never find her. She has vanished into the night. God have mercy on their souls! (He drops on his knees and tries to pray. Enfield comes back.)

Enfield: She is wandering about in the night alone and I cannot help her. What are you doing?

Melksham: Praying for her soul.

Enfield: Praying for a soul so wild and strong as Charlotte's? You might as well pray that the storm outside will cease raging. Was that a cry?

Melksham: (Getttng to his feet) No.

Enfield: She cannot rest. I have always known it, but now I see it. We put her under the ground, but she cannot rest.

Melksham: How should she rest, with the sin of self-murder on her soul.

Enfield: You mean that because she took her life, she is forced to wander through the night like this? Forced! Charlotte, whom no one could force to do anything while she was alive!

Melksham: I do mean it. How can we hope that her soul, dying in that awful sin, could escape hell?

Enfield: You are a parson. You should know about it.

Melksham: I do know. 'Tis the last, most rebellious of all crimes. I must say it, though I pity her and you, from the bottom of my heart.

Enfield: Don't waste your pity. I want none of it. Nor would she. (Takes the pistol from his pocket, and looks at it.)

Melksham: Come, kneel down with me, and let us pray together.

Enfield: Pray?—No. This is the pistol she did it with. Her little fingers—little, but strong, too—held this handle. Hark! she is calling me (He strides to the window, flings it open, and calls): Charlotte! I am coming. Wait.

Melksham: What are you going to do?

Enfield: I am going to join her. (He shoots himself. Melksham hurries to his side, ascertains that he is dead, and goes out to the kitchen to find Cyrus.)

CURTAIN.

BLUEBEARD.

AN OLD TALE RE-TOLD.

CHARACTERS :

FATIMA :	*Bluebeard's wife.*
ANN :	*Her elder sister.*
ZULEIKA :	*Her slave.*
ABDUL :	*Another slave.*
HASSAN :	*A Nubian chief of Bluebeard's slaves.*

SCENE :

An upper chamber in an Arabian palace.

SCENE :—A luxurious and airy chamber, furnished with Eastern splendour, at the top of a great palace. On the right, rich curtains mask an archway. On the left, a pillared opening reveals a stone balcony (which overlooks the courtyard of the palace). At the back, a great triple-arched window-opening shows the sky.

Near this window, Fatima lounges idly on a sofa. She is a lovely and slender little creature, hardly more than a child. Beside her couch is a low table, on which stand a dish of sweetmeats and a hand mirror.

Zuleika, a youngish and goodlooking slave-girl, sits on a cushion in the left-front corner of the room, twanging a musical instrument.

At the rise of the curtain, Fatima yawns and sits up straighter so that she can look out of the window.

Fatima : What a long, hot afternoon! Zuleika, how am I to amuse myself till my husband comes back?

Zuleika : You are very hard to amuse, mistress.

Fatima : No, I'm not. I'm easy to amuse. But what is the use of being married when your husband's away?

(Zuleika twangs a few idle notes)

Fatima : (Rising) Do you think he will be away much longer?

Zuleika : That one can't say.

(Fatima selects a sweetmeat and nibbles at it as she stands leaning against the window-opening, gazing out)

Fatima : The shadows are a little longer than they were an hour ago. Arn't shadows slow things, Zuleika?

Zuleika : Very slow, when you're watching them.

Fatima : I like them. They all lean this way from the west. Later, they will be like long, black fingers pointing towards us. (Leaving the window) Where are my keys, Zuleika?

Zuleika : Where did you leave them?

Fatima : Never mind where I left them. You should have put them away for me.—Oh! there they are, on that cupboard.

Zuleika : (Fetching the keys) You must take better care than that of Bluebeard's keys.

Fatima : I can take care of them. (Holds up the bunch with one key pointing upward) Look, Zuleika, what key is this?

Zuleika : The key of the Hall of Painted Dragons.

Fatima : No. Don't you really know what key it is?—The key of the little closet I mayn't go into.

Zuleika : Yes. I thought it was that one.

Fatima : Don't you wish you knew what was inside?—Of course I wouldn't open it for anything. I know better than that how to look after my husband's keys; besides, he'd be most dreadfully angry, wouldn't he? I wonder how he'd know if I did go in?

Zuleika : Perhaps he would never find out. But, of course, he might, and then—

Fatima : Yes. . . . (She rises and moves away) It's so still, I do believe everybody in the palace is asleep. (She chooses another sweetmeat) He may come back any day, now, Zuleika. I wonder what he will bring me when he does come? He's sure to bring me a present, don't you think so? I hope it will be some amber beads. I do want some amber beads so badly. I shall never be happy till I have an amber necklace.

Zuleika : You have many necklaces far more precious than amber.

Fatima : I can't help it. I want amber. I want heaps of amber: amber chains, and an amber footstool, and an amber spoon to eat with. (Sitting down again beside Zuleika) Zuleika! do you think that perhaps there are amber things in the little closet?

Zuleika : I don't know. I can't think what can be inside it.

Fatima : Don't you wish that we knew? I can't think of anything more precious than diamonds, and glittering tapestries, and veils woven of gold. If it were the Peacock Room that was closed, I could understand it, for I have never seen anything more beautiful than their lustrous wings, and all the lovely little strange things in the cupboards. But these we are allowed to look at. What can be more wonderful!

Zuleika : I have heard of singing trees, and of water that makes old people young.

Fatima : In fairy tales. There are no real singing trees, are there, Zuleika?

Zuleika : I have never seen any.

Fatima : (Rising slowly, and speaking with a certain hesitation) I think I'll go and look at some of the old rooms again. Of course, I won't go into that one. Wait here for me, Zuleika, I won't be long.

(She goes out. Zuleika rises, goes to the curtains, and peeps out after her. Then she turns back into the room as Ann comes in from the balcony)

Ann : (Calling as she enters) Fatima!—Zuleika, where is your mistress?

Zuleika : She went out with her bunch of keys to explore the palace. (Goes back to her cushion and her instrument)

Ann : Has that game not begun to pall yet? She told me that she had been into all the rooms, and was tired even of the most beautiful.

Zuleika : (Not looking at Ann) She is restless, and impatient for her husband's return.

Ann : I could almost wish that he would come, although when he does come I must go.—Did you notice which way she went?

Zuleika : Along the gallery to the western tower.

Ann : Where the forbidden closet is?

Zuleika : I think it's there, isn't it?

Ann : She wouldn't be foolish enough to open it! Something hangs over my spirits this afternoon, like a cloud hanging under the sun.

Zuleika : Shall I play to you, Mistress Ann?

Ann : No—I will fight it down. I am not a child to be depressed by causeless fancies.

(She goes to the window and looks out. Zuleika watches her stealthily, starting when she thinks she hears a noise from behind the curtains.)

Ann : The heat hangs quivering in the air. There is not so much as a breath of wind to refresh us. Zuleika, what would I not give to see my brothers riding to us across the plain, with their helmets glittering, and their strong bare arms!

Zuleika : (Rising, her uneasiness growing) I would they were coming, Mistress Ann.

Ann : 'Tis but a silly whim: but, you know, they are often hunting in the Valley of Red Cactus at this time of the year. If they were there, it would not be so very far for them to come. Call Abdul for me!

(Zuleika strikes a little gong with her knuckles, Abdul comes in through the small door on the left).

Ann : Abdul, set a slave on the swiftest horse and bid him ride hotfoot for the Valley of Red Cactus and there seek for my brothers. If he find them, let him bid them come to me in all haste. And give him this ring for token.

(Gives Abdul a ring. He bows and withdraws, Zuleika takes the opportunity of peering through the curtains after him.)

Ann : There ! I have obeyed the idlest whim that ever crossed a woman's fancy. And I feel the happier for it.

(She sits down)

Zuleika : Mistress Ann, do you hear anything ?

Ann : No.

Zuleika : What do you suppose would happen if the lady Fatima were to enter the forbidden closet ?

Ann : Ruin ! You know what Bluebeard is—you know what he said. Do you think she will be tempted ?

Zuleika : She was very curious.

Ann : She is only a child. She has a child's curiosity.

Zuleika : Do go after her, mistress. I think she may mean to go in, and I wouldn't for twenty ducats that harm should come to her.

Ann : Why didn't you tell me this before ? (Rises to go)

Fatima : (From without) Ann ! Ann !

(She rushes in through the curtains)

Sister Ann ! Oh ! there you are.

(Runs to her sister's arms)

Ann : What is it little sister ? What's the matter ?

Fatima : Oh ! Ann, I'm so frightened. I have been so frightened, I think I will die.

Ann : What's the matter ? Tell me quietly what it is. Don't tremble so. I'm here to take care of you.

Fatima : Oh ! Ann, it was so dreadful. Don't scold me. I went into the forbidden closet.

Ann : Fatima !

Zuleika : Mistress ! mistress ! your slippers ! they are stained—they are red.

Fatima : It's blood. The floor was thick with blood.

Zuleika : Oh ! mercy !

Fatima : There were no singing birds, Zuleika, no diamonds, nothing pretty ; but all round the walls—Oh Ann ! it turns me cold to think of it !—all round the walls, hanging by their hair, were the heads of murdered women.

(Zuleika gives a little shriek)

Fatima : With their eyes all open ! I know I shall see them staring at me until I die.

Ann : No, you won't.

Zuleika : But what will Bluebeard say when he comes back?

Fatima : Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?

Ann : He must never know that you went in. We won't let him know. Come, we'll think it out quietly. Zuleika, take these slippers away and let them be burnt.

(*Zuleika takes out the slippers, Ann and Fatima sit down together.*)

Now, tell me, little sister, do you think that anyone could have seen you enter the closet?

Fatima : No, I'm quite sure there was nobody about.

Ann : Why, that's alright. And did you lock the door after you?

Fatima : I don't know. I can't remember. I was so frightened, I just ran.

Ann : Give me the keys. I will go and see if it is locked.

Fatima : The keys? I must have dropped them. Oh, Ann, they are in that dreadful room! Zuleika, you must go and fetch my keys for me.

(*Zuleika has just come in, carrying a bowl, a napkin, and fresh slippers.*)

Zuleika : No, mistress, I implore you. Not if you were to kill me, I couldn't go and look at those horrors.

Ann : I'll go. First, drink this, Fatima . . . That's better—you look more like yourself again. Zuleika bring your mistress clean slippers and let these stained ones be burnt.

Fatima : Ann, don't be long.

Ann : I won't be a minute.

(*Ann goes out through the curtains. Zuleika sits on the floor and bathes Fatima's feet.*)

Zuleika : To think of it being so locked up! I thought at least there must be some wonderful treasure.

Fatima : Zuleika, who do you think were those women and how did they die?

Zuleika : They were killed, I expect.

Fatima : Yes, but how?

Zuleika : That one can't say. Why your feet are quite cold.

Fatima : I am cold all over. I'm all shivery and frightened.

Zuleika : It's a pity you went in. Especially as there was nothing pretty to be seen.

Fatima : What do you think my husband would say if he knew ?

Zuleika : (Shaking her head) Husband's are strange folk. I told you that when you got married. They like to be obeyed. Now, I should say that no one had ever disobeyed my lord Bluebeard.

Fatima : I have always obeyed him up till now.

Zuleika : Up till now, yes.

Fatima : Don't talk of him. Tell me about other husbands.

Zuleika : There was a sultan, so I've heard, who married a new wife every morning and cut off her head next day.

Fatima : What did he do that for ?

Zuleika : I don't know. Then there was another whose wife disobeyed him. He flew into a dreadful passion and seized the unfortunate lady by the head—

Fatima : Stop ! Zuleika—Don't tell me any more.

Zuleika : Oh ! but it's true. I've seen the very man. They say he grew quite livid with rage and gnashed his great teeth—

Fatima : (Getting to her feet) Oh ! stop ! I can't bear it. I have been married such a little while and I was so happy.

Zuleika : And so young.

Fatima : Why shouldn't I be young ? I will get older.

Zuleika : That sultana I was telling you about was very young, too, and when her husband drew out his great shining scimitar—

Fatima : Zuleika, I forbid you to go on. Oh ! why doesn't Ann come !—What's that noise ?

Zuleika : It's in the court-yard. Shall I go and see what it is ?

Fatima : Yes, go.

(Zuleika puts the bowl and napkin on a table, goes out on to the balcony, and looks down. Meanwhile, Ann comes in, concealing the blood-stained keys from Fatima)

Fatima : Sister Ann, at last ! Have you got the keys ?

Ann : Yes.

Fatima : And you've locked the door ? Then no one need

ever know that I've been in—Oh! I'm so thankful. Sister Ann, Zuleika's been frightening me with the most horrid tales.

Zuleika : Mistress, come and see here. It's so exciting!

Ann : What's all that clamour? It sounds like people arriving.

Fatima : Ann! the keys are red with blood!

Ann : You dropped them on the floor, but we'll soon wash them. Zuleika!

Zuleika : (Coming into the room) You must come and see, mistress. Guess what has happened! (Catches sight of the keys) La!

Ann : Take these keys and wash them quickly.

Zuleika : Yes, but look over the balcony! Bluebeard has arrived.

Fatima : Bluebeard!

Ann : What!

Fatima : There must be some mistake. Sister Ann, don't go and look. Don't let him see me.

Ann : He shan't see you, Fatima. Don't be afraid.

Zuleika : (Washing the keys in her bowl) There's no mistake. The court-yard is filled with his men. They look weary, as though they had ridden far across the hot plain; but they have come back victorious for they are laden with rich spoils, and they have pale captives with them, bound by the wrists—

Fatima : But did you see my husband with them? Are you sure he was there?

Zuleika : Quite certain.—He stood frowning by the archway, a sunbeam lighting up his helmet and his blue beard flowing over his bosom. His left hand was resting thus on his great scimitar.

Fatima : Oh! why has he come back just this afternoon?

Ann : All will be well, Fatima. Trust to me.

Zuleika : Mistress Ann, I can't get these keys clean.

Ann : Give me the bowl—go quickly and get more hot water.

(Zuleika goes out by the small door)

Fatima : Wash them quite clean, Ann—he's sure to ask me for them at once. You know, he won't be pleased

to find you here. He said you might come and keep me company while he was away, but he hoped you would be gone when he returned.

Ann : Well, he sent us no notice of his coming.

Fatima : You won't leave me, will you, sister Ann ?

Ann : Not till all your fears are over, little sister.

Fatima : I wonder when he will send for me ?—I hope not soon.

(Enter Zuleika with a large pitcher and a basket) Here's Zuleika.

Zuleika : I have brought water, and soap, and soda—everything I could think of to make them clean.

Ann : Then throw this dirty water out of the window.

(Zuleika takes the bowl and empties water out of the window. The sound of a gong is heard)

Hassan : (From without) May one enter ?

Fatima : Enter.

(He comes in through the curtains and salaams)

Hassan : My master, Bluebeard, has returned, and desires your presence immediately.

Fatima : Sister Ann, I can't go yet.—Put it off a little while.

Ann : Hassan, go back and tell your master that the lady Fatima cannot come just yet. She is troubled with faintness. When she feels better she will come.

(Hassan salaams again and waits)

Ann : Well, what are you waiting for ?

Hassan : Is that a message to take Bluebeard ? When he gives an order it must be obeyed.

Zuleika : Hasten, slave! that message is from your mistress.

Hassan : I am here on Bluebeard's commands.

Fatima : Hassan, will you not take that message from me ? See, I am ill !

Hassan : If I were to take Bluebeard that message, I should not come back again to fetch you, but another would.

Ann : He speaks truly, Fatima.

Fatima : I know. I must go. Hassan, tell my husband that I will be with him immediately. I linger only to put on my ornaments. Then come back again to fetch me.

(Hassan salaams and departs)

Zuleika, the toilet tray—Ann, I am afraid to go to him. He will look right through me as he always does, and see all that is written on my heart.

Ann : You need not be afraid. We will deck you like a new bride, and then he will rejoice at your beauty and forget all else.

Fatima : Am I very pale ?

Ann : Yes, but that is soon remedied.

(Fatima sits down. Ann takes the tray from Zuleika, and proceeds to touch up her sister's face.)

Fatima : Zuleika, bring me the new veil Bluebeard gave me before he left.

Ann : And the jewel casket, Zuleika. We will make you so beautiful, that the very sun will hide himself. There, not even the oleander blossoms have a prettier blush than that. And your eyebrows shall be as black as the shadow of the archway in the courtyard.

Zuleika : What ornaments will you wear, mistress ?

Fatima : My bracelets and my anklets, and those three rings that my great grand-mother wore. I will choose the necklace, when sister Ann lets me have my own eyes again.

Zuleika : This blue one is the prettiest—or this.

Fatima : Slip on my anklets for me.

Zuleika : (Having done so) There !

Ann : And there !

Fatima : Am I beautiful ?

Zuleika : As the enchanted gazelle.

Ann : As my own lovely little sister.

Fatima : Then dress me quickly.

(She stands up. They rise too. Ann takes off Fatima's veil.)

Fatima : Let me see the necklace, Zuleika—no, not that one—this long glittering one.

Hassan : (Without) May one enter ? (The gong sounds.)

Fatima : No ! no ! It's Hassan. Finish me quickly.—Wait for me one moment, Hassan.

(Ann and Zuleika drape her veil, and deck her with jewels.)

Ann, if Bluebeard asks me about that closet I shall lie—I shall lie hard !

Ann : Of course you will. What else could you do ? But never think of it. Think how only yesterday, you were longing for your husband.

Fatima : Oh ! I am weary of husbands.

Zuleika : You must wear this brooch. 'Tis said to have come from the sea, and to have been worn by a fairy princess of Ind.

Fatima : Put it on.

Zuleika : It hangs there like the evening star on the bosom of the sunset.

Fatima : I am not big enough for a sunset, am I, sister Ann? Now am I finished ?

Ann : Quite.

Zuleika : The kings of Arabia might envy your husband.

Fatima : Then I'll go. Call in Hassan.

Zuleika : (Clapping her hands) Hassan !

(Hassan comes in through the curtains. Zuleika carries her bowl to the back of the room and busies herself with the keys.)

Fatima : (To Hassan) I am ready—kiss me, Ann (aside to Ann) Do I look guilty ?

Ann : Not a bit. But carry your head more boldly. You need not stay with him long. Plead faintness and come back to us.

Fatima : Oh ! I shan't stay long.

(Hassan holds the curtain for her and follows her out.)

Ann : All good fairies go with you, little sister.

(Goes to the curtains and watches her through them. then turns back into the room with a shiver, saying) : I know just the boisterous way he will embrace her.

(She sits on the cushion, and is leisurely putting the jewels back into the casket when Zuleika comes forward.)

Zuleika : Mistress Ann, do what I will, I cannot wash the blood from these keys.

Ann : Give them to me, and the napkin. Throw that water out of the window and bring fresh. We must have these clean, for Bluebeard is certain to ask her for them. I wonder what they are saying now ?

Zuleika : (Emptying the bowl and filling it) Perhaps he is showing her all the rich spoils they have brought back. I saw ivory, and rich stuffs, and bundles that I think were spices, I would love to go and see.

Ann : Bring me the water. What is a good thing for taking bloodstains off, Zuleika ?

Zuleika : I have tried everything that I can think of.

Ann : Nonsense, girl. Bring me soda.

Zuleika : I have tried soda.

Ann : Bring me a lemon.

Zuleika : I have tried lemon, too.

Ann : Bring me a lemon, and give me fewer words.

(Zuleika brings half a lemon. Ann is rubbing furiously at the keys.)

You don't know how to clean things. You should rub them.

Zuleika : I have rubbed them till my fingers ache.

Ann : In that cupboard there is hartshorn. We will try putting that in the water. And try rubbing them on the stones.

Fatima : (From without, cheerfully) Sister Ann !

Ann : Fatima coming back ! Take these, do not let her see them. And you must get them clean at any price

(Zuleika takes the bowl out of the room as Fatima comes in from the other side)

Fatima : Sister Ann !

Ann : (Going to meet her) Well, how was it ? What did he say ?

Fatima : Oh ! we needn't have been so afraid ! He suspects nothing, And he has brought me such lovely presents. Look, an amber necklace. You know how I have been wanting one. And there are amber bracelets, and anklets, and a veil to match. And look, this ring. Do you like it ?

Ann : It's beautiful.

Fatima : Oh ! they are lovely presents. There's a little ape that makes such funny faces ! And a whole length of linen, so fine, that you can draw it through a ring. And sweetmeats from Bagdad. Oh ! it will take two

slaves to carry all my presents up here. You shall have some of them, sister Ann, but we won't tell him, because he doesn't like you.

Ann : I'll call Zara and Zobedé to carry them up for you.

Fatima : Not now, I'm in a hurry. But isn't it fine to have such gorgeous presents ? Don't you think he must be very fond of me to bring me such heaps of things ? Let me look in the mirror to see if I look nice. Don't you think I might be a little rosier, sister Ann ?

Ann : No, I think the roses are just right. But why should you be in a hurry ?

Fatima : Oh ! I've got to go back to him. I only came for the keys. Bluebeard wants them and I must take them quickly. I'd nearly forgotten, I was so excited telling you about the presents.

Ann : You shall have them in a minute. There's no hurry. Come and sit beside me, and tell me more about the presents.

Fatima : Not now. I must go quickly. Give me the keys, sister Ann.

Ann : You must satisfy a little of my curiosity first. Tell me how Bluebeard received you.

Fatima ! (Sitting beside her) Oh ! most kindly. You would think he had been away for years instead of weeks. But he's waiting for me now. You mustn't keep me.

Ann : Is he well ?

Fatima : I think so,—I didn't ask.

Ann : Did you tell him that I was here ?

Fatima : No. But give me the keys.

Ann : Did he bring you robes, as well as jewels ?

Fatima : (Jumping up) Yes, but the keys ! Ann, it isn't like you to keep me when you know my husband is waiting.

Ann : I'll give them to you in one moment. I'm waiting for Zuleika.

Fatima : Has she got them ?

Ann : Yes.

Fatima : I'll call her.

(Goes towards the little door, but Zuleika comes in and

passes her, carrying a couple of napkins, and the bowl, which she hides from Fatima.)

Fatima : Zuleika, give me the keys.

Zuleika : It's no use, mistress Ann. Nothing has any effect on them.

Fatima : On what?

Zuleika : On the keys.

Fatima : Let me see them.—Oh horror! I can't take them to Bluebeard like that. What shall I do, sister Ann?

Ann : Don't worry, Fatima. They shall be quite clean before you take them to him. Give them to me, Zuleika.

(She takes the keys and napkins from Zuleika and sits down)

We'll see what hard rubbing can do.

Fatima : I'll help you. Give me half the bunch.

Zuleika : It's no use, mistress. I've tried everything, and I've rubbed and rubbed them and they won't come clean.

Fatima : Oh, dear!

Ann : Zuleika, hold your peace, and don't whine so. Have you tried a cut potato?

Zuleika : Yes. It was no good.

Fatima : They're not getting any cleaner. It's no use—my hand is trembling so that I can't rub them. And Bluebeard is waiting all this time—Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?

Ann : Fatima, trust to me. Don't be afraid.

Fatima : But what can you do, sister Ann? You are only a woman, too.

(The gong sounds)

Hassan : (From without) May one enter?

Fatima : It's Hassan.

Ann : No. Stay without.

Hassan : (Without) Bluebeard grows impatient. Is the lady Fatima coming?

Ann : She is even now on her way. . . . Fatima, you must tell him that the keys are lost. Say that we have looked everywhere for them. While you are gone we will dispose of them.

Fatima : Must I go, sister Ann? You know I can never deceive him.

Ann : There is nothing else to do. You must be brave, little Fatima. Do not keep him waiting longer.

Fatima : I will go. Oh ! but I dare not go. Ann, why are my hands trembling? Can't you stop them trembling?

Ann : I will go with you, Fatima.

Fatima : No, it will only anger him ; he hates you. I'll go now. But, Ann, hold me tight before I go.

(Ann embraces her closely and as soon as the embrace is relaxed, Fatima slips out quickly without another word or look)

Ann : She should not have to go alone. I should be with her.—Oh ! if only I were a man !

Zuleika : Why then you would be away hunting or fighting with your brothers, and the lady Fatima would be all alone.

Ann : That's true.

Zuleika : Unless, indeed, one of your brothers was a sister, and then, I suppose, he would be you, and you no better off.

Ann : Oh ! don't chatter so. We have got to hide these keys. Where shall it be ?

Zuleika : Throw them out of the window.

Ann : No, stupid creature. Someone would find them below.

Zuleika : I suppose they would not burn in the fire ?

Ann : (Looking about the room for a hiding-place) Of course not. You must use your brains to better purpose than that.

Zuleika : They say that the wild ostriches of the desert swallow such things.

Ann : What if they do? We have no ostrich here. Quick, think of something. We have not time to bury them. No cupboard nor chest would be safe, for Bluebeard may come to search for them himself.

Zuleika : I have it ! There is a little hole in the floor. I have often noticed it. Look !—we could drop them down there.

Ann : Excellent ! We'll drop them in.

(Drops keys down hole)

No one will be able to find them there.

Zuleika : And no one would think of looking. We'll move the rug over it to make all doubly safe.—There ! now Bluebeard may come and search the place down.

Ann : What a relief ! Those keys were a burning nightmare in my brain. Now, Zuleika, tidy the apartment in case Bluebeard does come. I wonder how it fares with Fatima ? I trust she will not droop her eyelids if he questions her. But it matters nothing. The keys are lost, and no amount of questions can alter that.

(The gong sounds)

Hassan : (From without) May one enter ?

Ann : }
Zuleika : } Enter !

(Hassan comes in)

Hassan : I have come for the keys.

Ann : I cannot give them to you, Hassan. They are lost.

Zuleika : (Impudently) They are lost where no one will ever find them !

Ann : Hush, Zuleika.

Hassan : So your mistress told Bluebeard. But afterwards, she confessed her deception, and it was she who bade me come and ask you to send them.

Ann : But the keys are indeed lost, Hassan. We are not lying.

Hassan : She bade me tell you that her life is forfeit if I do not return with them instantly. See, there is her ring for token.

Ann : It is her ring.

Zuleika : Yes, the ring is hers, but how did this fellow come by it ? May not Bluebeard have pulled it from her finger, and sent him with this trumped-up story to prove whether indeed we have the keys ?

Ann : No. I know this ring. It was long ago agreed between Fatima and me that she would send this to me if ever she needed a token. Well, what are we to do, Hassan ? The keys are indeed lost. We have dropped them down a hole.

Hassan : If I do not go back with them swiftly, it may be too late.

Zuleika : But they are lost, they are lost ! Oh ! dust be on my head.

Ann : Peace, Zuleika. We must find them, that is all. Move the rug.

(Zuleika does so)

There, Hassan, they are down that hole, and it goes down deep.

(Hassan kneels and examines the hole.)

Hassan : Zuleika, thrust me down your hand. Mine is too large.

Zuleika : Oh no ! My hand would not go in there. I should never be able to draw it out again.

Hassan : Not so many words. Thrust in you hand !

Zuleika : I won't. I worship the lady Fatima—but that may be a snake-hole.

Ann : Move, Hassan, I will try.

Zuleika : Mistress Ann, 'tis just the size for a snake-hole. You will be bitten for a surety.

Ann : The hole is larger below. I can move my hand about. Here they are ! I can feel them. Now to get them through the narrow opening . . . Oh ! I have dropped them again.

Hassan : Quickly, mistress. Bluebeard is not patient.

Ann : Wait . . . Here they are !

(Draws them out of the hole.)

Now, good Hassan, fly !

Hassan : They are stained with blood.

Ann : Yes. I had almost forgotten. But what can we do ? You must take them.

Hassan : That much is certain.

(He salaams and goes)

Ann : (To Zuleika) Now we are lost.

(She sits down stonily. Zuleika sits down and begins to sob.)

Zuleika : Oh ! my poor, poor little mistress !

Ann : Stop your wailing. What good can it do ?

(She rises and walks restlessly about the room.)

Oh ! this heat is intolerable ! The suspense is intolerable. If one could but guess what they were saying.

Zuleika : (Still weeping) He has no bowels of mercy.

He will have no compassion on her.

Ann : Oh ! if one went by you, the world was lost before it was made !

Zuleika : Nothing.

Ann : I must go down and see what is happening. What if he hates me ? He can only kill us. Wait here for me—I am going to her.

(She goes out through the curtains. Zuleika is left in a state of extreme suspense and anxiety. She is peering between the closed curtains when Abdul comes in from the left with a bowl in his hand.)

Abdul : Aha, have I caught you peeping ?

Zuleika : I wasn't peeping.

Abdul : Zuleika, who puts on such mighty fine airs, prying like a common slave !

Zuleika : 'Tis you are the common slave. And what business have you here in my mistress's chamber without being summoned ?

Abdul : I have come to sprinkle the floor with rose-water, according to custom. And if I have any more rough words, I'll sprinkle a few drops in your pretty face. 'Twill wash out some of those roses that your mother never planted in you.

Zuleika : (Moving quickly away) Impudent fellow ! 'Tis not the custom to sprinkle any room, save when it is empty.

Abdul : There is no one here now, that I can see.

Zuleika : (Angrily) I am here—I have been bidden to wait up here alone when anything may be happening down below. Abdul, have you heard nothing of what is going forward ?

Abdul : I heard some stir in the other part of the palace, but 'twas no business of mine. I have my work to do.

(Begins to sprinkle the floor)

Zuleika : (Going close to him so that he has to leave off sprinkling) Good Abdul, leave off sprinkling, I pray you, and go find out further for me. I am torn to know what is happening to my mistress.

Abdul : "Good Abdul," now. I was "impudent fellow"

a minute ago. Stand further off, or my sprinkling will damage your dress.

(Makes as though to sprinkle, but does not)

Zuleika : Do you know that she is in Bluebeard's presence, and he wrath with her ?

Abdul : When Bluebeard is wrathful, this other side of the house suits me best. No, I'll not go down.

Zuleika : Simpleton ! Does the tiger kill the fly ?

Abdul : The fly stays not to ask. He trusts to his wings.

Zuleika : (Stamping her foot) Wretch !

(Ann appears between the curtains. Abdul salaams)

Ann : What are you doing here, Abdul ?

Abdul : Sprinkling the floor, mistress.

Ann : Leave it now. Come back later to finish. Come at sunset,—you will have the room to yourself then.

Abdul : I will come back at sunset.

(Salaams and goes)

Zuleika : (When he is out of the room) What news ?

Ann : The worst ! Bluebeard cannot contain his anger. He shouted, he raged, he swore that all those murdered women were wives of his that he had slain for their curiosity. He dragged her by the hair ! . . . All she could gain by her tears and passionate pleadings was leave to live till sunset. They have gone to the courtyard whence they can see the last rays of the sun fade from the topmost tower. Heaven grant that before that moment aid may come ! There must be help somewhere for the utterly helpless—for slaves, and infants, and women.

Zuleika : Mistress Ann, there is just the faintest chance that your brothers may come before sunset.

Ann : Yes. And now I remember, that is why I left her and came up here. She asked me to watch from this window, whence one can see over the whole wide plain.

Zuleika : They are in the courtyard, you say ? Then come to the balcony. We could watch them from there.

Ann : No. I can't bear to look at them again.

(Zuleika goes out on to the balcony, and looks down. Then she comes back into the room to say eagerly) :

Zuleika : Mistress Ann ! she is kneeling at her prayers, while he scowls furiously with drawn scimitar. Suppose his patience does not last till sunset ? I would not trust him. Never have I seen him looking so dreadful, and he was always a dreadful-looking man.

Ann : Hush, girl. We must listen in case she calls to me. I begged her to call to me so that I may be sure she still lives.

Zuleika : Oh ! she lives. I could see that. But so distraught ! With her hair all streaming round her.— I'll go back to the balcony and look again.

(She goes out on to the balcony and looks down. Fatima's voice comes up from the courtyard) :

Fatima : Sister Ann ! Sister Ann ! can you see nothing ?

Ann : (Calling) Nothing but the sun shining over the wide, empty plain.

(Zuleika comes in again)

Zuleika : It frightens me, he looks so hideous. He seems to gnash his teeth ! Oh ! who would have thought, a few hours ago, that we could all be so upset ?

Ann : Hush, girl ! listen.

Zuleika : (After an instant's silence) Oh ! Mistress Ann ! if only we had the magic lamps, and the magic rings that we read about in stories ! we could summon genii from the ends of the earth—

Ann : Zuleika, we have no magic rings, and there is nothing to be done by wishing. We are helpless women, and all we can do is to wait for the help that may come or bear what ever happens if it does not come. Now, keep silence, and let me listen for my sister's voice, or—by Allah ! I will send you from the room and have you beaten. Do you hear me ?

Zuleika : Yes, mistress. Well, as there is nothing else to be done, I had better pray. (She kneels.)

Fatima : (From the courtyard) Sister Ann ! Sister Ann ! what see you now ?

Ann : I can see nothing but the sun shining over the wide plain, and a little dust moving in the breeze.

Zuleika : There was no breeze a little while ago.

Ann : Nor was there any dust when first I came to the

window . . . 'Tis an odd little cloud of dust. Zuleika—it's moving nearer! It's coming this way!

Zuleika : Let me see. (runs to the window) That dust is not stirred by the wind.

Ann : Bring me a scarf. It grows chill by the window. If only that dust may be raised by the hoofs of their horses! It certainly comes nearer, Zuleika. But, alas! already the rays of the low sun are turning it golden.

(Bringing a red scarf.)

Zuleika : Oh! that they might come before the sun sets! (from the courtyard) Sister Ann! Sister Ann! What see you now.

Ann : (Not heeding the cry) Zuleika! plague wither my false eyes! These are no horsemen coming in the dust—it is a goatherd and his goats!

(Turns from the window)

Fatima : (From the courtyard) Sister Ann! Sister Ann! Do you see nothing?

Ann : (Calls) Nothing but the low sun hanging over a desolate plain! Oh! my little sister, my little sister, I cannot help you now.—Nothing can help you now. I'm going down to her, Zuleika. 'Tis no use my staying here.

Zuleika : Do not go down, Mistress Ann. You may get hurt.

Ann : Of what use is my life? My little sister was all that I cared for in the world.

(She goes out through the curtains, dropping the red scarf as she goes.)

Zuleika : All my prayers wasted! Never will I put knee to ground again.

(She sobs. Goes out on to the balcony and looks down and then comes back and throws herself on the couch, crying.

(Enter Abdul with a bowl)

Abdul : What is all this weeping?

Zuleika : Oh! Abdul, look down into the courtyard. You will see my little mistress praying in her sister's arms, while great Bluebeard stands over her with a scimitar.

Abdul : You women must be kept in order.

(Sprinkles the floor)

Zuleika : (Jumping up in anger) What are you doing in here ? Go out of the room. You were told not to come back till sunset.

Abdul : Well ! It is sunset now.

Zuleika : It's not, it cannot be. It's a great while off till sunset.

Abdul : Look out of the window yourself, if you will not believe me. Am I a one-eyed mule that I cannot see when the sun sets ?

Zuleika : (Tearfully) Would I could push it up the sky again.

(She goes to the window.)

It has not set. Only the very lowest rim has touched the hills. (Suddenly calling wildly in her excitement) Why—Mistress Ann ! Mistress Ann !—those are no goats ! they are horsemen coming nearer. Look, Abdul, look how the sunrays gleam golden on their helmets. They are riding in a golden haze of dust. Allah grant they be in time !

Abdul: What ails the girl ? she must be possessed.

Zuleika : Nay, Abdul. These are my mistress' brothers riding to help her. Be glad !—do not pretend. She is your mistress as well as mine.

Abdul : Let me see ?—Allah ! how fast they ride ! but they can scarce be here before sunset.

Zuleika : I will wave a signal from the window to show them the danger we are in. Watch, meanwhile, lest the sun set while I'm away from it. (She looks round, sees the scarlet scarf, runs with it to the window, and waves it out, crying) :—For the love of life, make haste !—Abdul, the sun is setting ! It is almost gone !

Abdul : Give me the scarf. Now run with all your speed to the courtyard, call out to Bluebeard, and make up some news to tell him. That will give us a moment longer.

(Zuleika runs out, her voice can be heard as she runs down the stairs, calling) :

Zuleika : Bluebeard ! Bluebeard !

(Abdul still holds the scarf from the window. The stage is slowly darkening. Now he calls out) :

Abdul: Through that archway! Make haste! Make haste! lest you be too late!

(He watches for a moment longer, then turns back into the room. A great uproar rises from the courtyard. Abdul hurriedly crosses the room, and looks down from the balcony. He exclaims in strong excitement):

Beard of the prophet!

(Suddenly he moves back, dropping his bowl, and leans against a pillar covering his face with his hand. He exclaims, in a tone of utter relief):

Allah be thanked!

(The stage is almost dark)

CURTAIN.

THE STRANGE PHYSICIAN

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT.

PERSONS :

JOHN DALE.
MARION (his wife).
JACK (their son).
A PHYSICIAN.

SCENE : A room in the Dale's house, Johannesburg.

TIME : The present day.

SCENE : A hall furnished, comfortably but not luxuriously, as a living room, and obviously more a man's room than a woman's. The front door faces the audience, and there is a window to the right of it. A door in the left wall leads to the bedrooms, and there is another door in the right wall. Jack Dale, a pleasant faced young man, sits reading the paper. His father comes in, wearing a very worried expression. He is a spare, patient-looking man, but tall as his son.

Dale : Hasn't he come yet, Jack ?

Jack : No. (Takes out his watch) He's late.

Dale ; Ten minutes late.

Jack : Don't worry, father. He's sure to be here soon, and when he does come, you bet he'll fix things up alright. He's an awfully clever old chap, they say.

Dale : Dr. Foster has a very great opinion of his ability. He told me that he was the greatest specialist in Switzerland.

Jack : Oh ! then he's Swiss ?

Dale : I don't know that he is. He was last in Switzerland, but I shouldn't like to guess his nationality.

Jack : Neither should I. He seems to have been in most countries. Have you ever, in your life, met anyone more hard to place ?

Dale : He interests me as a doctor, but only as a doctor. (Looking at his watch) Time seems of little importance to him. I think I'll go and wait in the garden, Jack. Call me as soon as he comes.

(Goes out to the right)

Jack : Right you are.

(He settles down to his paper again. A ring and knock at the front door. Jack hurries to open it. Enter the physician. He is a tall, thin, old, Jewish-looking man, with silver grey hair and beard. In spite of his age he seems to have great strength and vitality. He carries himself with dignity, which breaks now and then into almost savage restlessness, as though a fire raged within. The most remarkable thing about him is the expression that burns in his eyes, which may be horror, may be despair, or may be a passion of weariness. His voice and manner of speaking, vary from acute penetration to pre-occupied indifference. He is never sympathetic —perhaps he has no feeling to spare for others ; and his scorn lurks always ready.)

Jack : Good morning, sir. Come in. Let me take your hat. I'm glad you've come ; my father's awfully anxious.

Physician: (Scrutinizing him) How is the patient ?

Jack : The nurse says she is wonderfully better.

Physician: Haven't you seen her ?

Jack : You left strict orders that we were not to go in.

Physician: (With indifference) Did I ?

Jack : Have you forgotten ?

Physician: If your memory were as overburdened as mine is, you might sometimes drop details by the way. Details —hah ! I have forgotten more than any of you will ever know.

Jack : I suppose you've had a lot of experience, travelling about, and so on ?

Physician: I have. I might have gathered great wisdom if I could have kept my mind off the trail of its own burden. —Where's your father ?

Jack : I'll call him.

(Opens door on the right and calls) :

Jane, please tell the master that the doctor is here. —He's in a great state of mind. Can't settle down to anything.

Physician: Aha ! restless, is he ? H'm—the gadfly. Driven from one thing to another. I know the symptoms.—Are you not excited too ?

Jack : Not in the same way. I've never known my mother any different from what she is now. She went out of her mind when I was born.

Physician: So little time ago? I thought it was longer than that.

Jack : (Rather hotly) It's 25 years ago.

Physician: Only 25 years ?

(Lapses into a reverie)

Physician: (Presently) Well, if I have not succeeded in curing her, you may know that her case is hopeless. Mental cures are my province. I can cure any illness of the mind, except despair. Minds are strange things, Master Dale. Even young and empty minds like yours.

Jack : What age are you ?

Physician: Eh ?

Jack : I didn't mean to be impertinent. But it seems to me that you've forgotten what you were like at 25.

Physician: I have. (Laughs mirthlessly) I have forgotten.

Jack : Here's my father.

(Enter Dale)

Dale : Ah ! you've come, doctor. Thank heavens ! I

suppose you'll go at once to see your patient?

Physician: Yes. But I'll go alone. It is better for her to see only strangers at first. (To Jack) Tell the nurse I am here.

(Jack goes through the door on the left)

Dale: Do you think there is hope?

Physician: I never refuse anyone hope. It's a toy that amuses many and harms none.—But I think I have cured your wife.

Dale: Whether you have or not, we owe you deep gratitude for all the trouble you have taken. I'm afraid we've rather spoilt your holiday.

Physician: My—*holiday?*

Dale: I understood that you had come to South Africa for a holiday.

Physician: No, I'm passing through the country. That's all. Passing through . . . But you need trouble yourself with no gratitude. I count it gain—deliberate gain, when I can do good to someone.

Dale: You have a charitable nature.

Physician: Not so. I care nothing for those to whom I do the good. How should I? They pass by me and are gone. But to do the good counts to one's credit, does it not?

Dale: I should think so.

Physician: But do you know it? No. How can any of us be certain? But it is my hope—my toy and delusion. Take your case, for instance. What is it to me that for 25 years you have been burying your youth and your dreams, inch by inch, at the feet of a woman with a dead mind? Isn't that so? You see, I have read you like an open book. But what is it to me, except that by waking her for you I may gain for myself some credit—somewhere in the far future which your vision cannot pierce. Let be. You are not able to comprehend.

(They sit in silence, the physician brooding, Dale watching him, till Jack comes in)

Jack: They are ready for you, doctor. Shall I lead the way?

Physician: You can wait for me here. I know the way.

(He goes out)

Dale : You are right, Jack. That physician is a strange man.

Jack : Isn't he? I'm not generally curious, but I must say, I wish I could make him out.

Dale : If he can give me back your mother, that is all I care about. What does his motive matter? or his method?

Jack : Well, I hope to goodness, he will, father, for your sake.

Dale : For my sake, only?

Jack : And hers, too, of course.

Dale : Not for your own, my boy?

Jack : Oh! yes. But after all, you've had to be both parents to me, haven't you?

Dale : I've tried to be.

Jack : Succeeded, too.

Dale : (After a short pause) Look here, Jack, he talks about the credit of doing good and visions of the future, and so on—but here, in this ordinary room of ours, I am waiting to know whether this is to be a second wedding-day for me, or whether all my life is to be wasted.—Strange, isn't it?

Jack : Yes, I know. These philosophizing fellows forget that one is made of flesh and blood.

Dale : (Who is moving restlessly about the room) She used to sing so merrily. I suppose you can't imagine your mother singing?

Jack : No, I can't . . . Funny, you know,—when one's waiting for anything like this it's just when one ought to be able to read, and forget about the time. But somehow one can't read.

Dale : (Producing an album) Jack! come and look here, that's your mother as she was when I married her.

Jack : Pretty, eh? Awfully pretty. Yes, you've shown it to me before.

Dale : (Turning over the leaves of the album) And here —that's as she was when I first knew her, a romping, curly-haired little girl.

Jack : By Jove, yes. Quite a pretty little thing. Queer dresses they used to wear in those days, didn't they?

Dale I suppose it would strike you so. (Shuts up the

album and puts it away before he speaks.) He's taking a long time, Jack.

Jack: Yes. (Looks at his watch.) Oh! not so very long. We're feeling impatient, you see.

Dale: Where's my tobacco? You've been helping yourself to it again, eh?

Jack: No. There it is, on the shelf where you always keep it.

Dale: So it is. Curious that. I overlooked it. If the news were satisfactory, he would have seen it at once, and come straight to tell us.

Jack: Oh! he's talking, you bet. Talking to the nurse. He's a demon for talking: yards of abstruse.—

(Door shuts in distance.)

Dale: } There he comes!
Jack: } There he is!

Dale: It is too much to hope for, after all these years.

Physician: (Opening door, but speaking to nurse outside) I'll be back in a moment, nurse.

(He comes in)

Well, are you prepared for any news I may bring yon?

Jack: Have you cured her? Can you tell yet?

Dale: Let us know, for heaven's sake!

Physician: What I have promised, I have performed. Mrs. Dale is restored to her right mind.

Dale: Thank God.

Jack: I say, that's splendid news. Doctor, you're a brick! (Goes up as though to shake hands with the doctor, but as he looks into his eyes, his expression changes, and he says,) How many times have you seen all this before?

Physician: Endless times.

Jack: That's the impression you always give me!

Dale: Is she quite cured? Are you sure there will be no relapse?

Physician: No relapse, if you are careful to let nothing startle her for the first few days. She is quite cured.

Dale: I don't know how to thank you. Words are too weak.

Physician: I need no thanks. I told you that I have my own

reasons for doing what good I can. Now, I'm going to bring her in here : so remember that her mind has been a blank for some years, and she must have no shock.

Dale : You need not tell *me* to be careful !

(Exit physician)

Dale : It's unbelievable ! Open the window, John ! I wish we had some flowers about. Jove ! what a lovely day. I'm glad the sun's shining.

Jack : Wonder if she'll find things changed ?

Dale : She's never been inside this house. . . . I expect she'll notice a good deal of change in me.

Jack : She won't even know me. Doesn't it seem extraordinary ?

Dale : (Looking at his watch) I ought to be at office. I havn't been late for years.

Jack : Oh ! hang work. I expect they'll give me the sack, when I go down, but what of that ?

Marion : (Without) Where's John ?

Jack : Is that her voice ?

(Dale nods)

It's the first time I've heard her speak.

(Enter the physician and Marion.)

Marion : I don't know this room. It's strange. It's not our sitting room.

Physician: You must remember that you have lost your memory for a few years, and have only just got it back. Most things will seem strange at first. Turn round There are people in the room.

Marion : Yes. I don't want to meet strangers just now.

Physician: I think you'll find that you know them. Turn and see.

Marion (Looking at her son) Why, It's John !—my John ! (going to her son, and putting her arms round him.) Of course I know you. I should have known you at once, only that I was afraid to look. You havn't changed at all, at least—hardly at all.

Jack : But I say! how on earth do you know me, mother ?

Marion : Why do you call me mother ?

Dale : John ! be careful. Don't startle her.

Jack : Oh, I don't know—sort of—for a lark, you know.

Marion : John, you have changed ! You are not the same.

What's the matter ? How have you changed ? Tell me what it is ?

Physician: Only that you've mistaken you son for your husband.

Dale : You told us not to shock her.

Marion : My son ! that great big man my son. I havn't got a son. There must be some mistake.

Physician: No mistake, Mrs. Dale. That's your son. You went out of your mind when he was born.

Marion : Then where's John ? Is he dead ? Answer me, one of you.

Dale : Marion, can't you recognise me ?

Marion : No, I don't know you.

Dale : Don't be shocked—I am your husband.

Marion : Oh ! no, you're not. You're a stranger. I'm sure I've never seen you before. Doctor, won't you take me away ? I can't stay here ; I'm frightened. That old man my husband !

Dale : I was afraid you would find me changed.

Marion : That's his voice ! He always speaks like that when he's hurt. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you know,although you've got his voice, you *can't* be John.

Dale : You're not hurting my feelings. Don't bother about me. I'm afraid we've been a little too sudden for you, but wait just a little, and you'll find things will come right.

Marion : But it's all so absurd. I don't understand.

Physician: It's simple enough if you would only remember what I have told you. You have been out of your mind for some time, and there is a big gap in your memory. That's all.

Marion : Yes, but for how long ?

Physician: How long was it ?—25 years.

Marion : 25 years !—I didn't know that I was 25 years old.

Dale : Doctor, wouldn't it be best for her to go away from us all for a time, till she can get used to the change ?

Physician: Yes, I daresay.

Dale : She could go down to the seaside with nurse.

Marion : Yes, please do let me ! I shall suffocate, if I stay here. You're all telling me such dreadful things, and that man is pretending to be my John. I'm afraid of him.

He can't be John. Doctor, do take me away with you quickly.

Physician: Could the nurse have her things packed in half an hour?

Dale: I should think so.

Physician: Very well. I'm going to Cape Town by this morning's train. Send Mrs. Dale and the nurse down with me, and I'll look after them on the journey. She's quite cured now. You needn't worry about her.

Dale: Thanks. (Stands apart with the physician, talking.)

Jack: Mother, come and sit down. You'll get tired of standing.

Marion: So you are my son?

Jack: Yes, mother.

Marion: Is it true?

Jack: Perfectly true. (Puts a stool at her feet) I'm going to sit down here, then I won't seem so frightfully big. You look rather afraid of me, you know.

Marion: I can't get used to you. How can you be my son?

Jack: Well, I don't know, I expect you will get used to me in time. It is rather absurd, isn't it? Look at the size of your hands compared to mine.

Marion: What were you like when you were a baby?

Jack: Like other babies, I suppose.

Marion: Oh, no. I'm sure you weren't.

Jack: Little and red and crinkly. They say I used to cry a great deal.

Marion: Poor little thing! I expect they used to let pins run into you, and let your feet get cold, with no mother to look after you.

Jack: I don't know. I can't remember.

Physician: Au revoir, Mrs. Dale. I'll be back in half an hour to fetch you.

Marion: Thank you.

Dale: Take care of your mother, Jack.

Jack: Right oh! (Exit Dale and the physician)

Marion: They call you Jack.

Jack: Yes.

Marion: I wanted you to be called after your father if you were a boy. John remembered that. And I wanted

you to be a boy. You know, I sewed all your baby clothes for you, every stitch. It would have been such fun dressing you in them. I wonder who did it?

Jack: Some stupid old nurse, I suppose.

Marion: I'm glad they called you Jack. But to think that I've missed all your childhood and boyhood—and your first knickerbockers! Little boys are so sweet about those.

Jack: Oh! I remember those.—Rather! I was proud of them.

Marion: I wonder who taught you to say your prayers? and to clean your teeth? Let me see—Oh! yes, they're beautifully white and clean.

Jack: You know, it's ripping to see you looking intelligent, and talking like this.

Marion: What have I been like all this time?

Jack: You just sat still, not speaking, not seeing anything.

Marion: And that's all the mother you've known? Poor little boy!—and your father?

Jack: He's been awfully good to me. And to you, too, mother. You don't know how good he's been.

Marion: No, I don't. I'm sure I shall think very highly of him when I get to know him. But when I last remember —what seems yesterday to me, you know—my John was so young and strong and handsome. Oh! far better looking than you are now. And he's gone for ever. I can't get used to it.

(Enter Dale)

Dale: The nurse is packing for you, Marion.

Marion: Is she?

Jack: Come along, father. Come and sit down here and talk to her. Mother and I are great pals already, aren't we? (Bending over her) Won't you kiss me? I've never had a mother kiss me, you know.

Marion: (Kissing him) My little boy!

Jack: I believe you'll always think of me in long clothes, with a tooth brush in my hand.

(Goes to door. Marion glances at Dale, then rises to her feet)

Marion: Jack!

Jack: Yes, mother?

Marion : Don't leave me.

Jack : I'm leaving you with father.

Marion : I don't want to be left with him. I don't know him. He's a stranger.

Jack : Just for a few minutes, mother. Then I'll be back.

Marion : Please don't go.

Dale : Better stay, Jack.

Jack : Rather not. You two must get to know each other.

Dale : The nurse is packing your things, Marion. You'll be off to Cape Town within the hour. Won't you stay a few minutes with me?

Marion : I suppose so. Don't be long, Jack.—Come here before you go. I want to look at you properly. (Putting her hand on his shoulders) Your eyes are grey like mine. Was John pleased?

Dale : Very.

Marion : (After looking round to take this in) What a funny neck-tie. I suppose that's fashionable?

Jack : Rather! it's *the* thing.—My socks too, you see.

Marion : (Laughing) Oh!—very nice!—What a big man you are! and to think that once you were little enough to lie in my arms. Did anybody ever put you there? . . . Be back again soon, Jack.

Jack : Right, oh. (He goes out)

Marion : (Smiling with some tenderness) What a nice boy he is! he must have been a very sweet little boy.

Dale : Yes. Won't you sit down, dear?

Marion : No, thank you. You know, I'm very sorry. I suppose that you are my husband—but I can't feel as though you were. You're old enough to be my father, aren't you?

Dale : I suppose so.

Marion : I never thought of that! I must have grown old, too.

Dale : No. Your mind has been resting all this time. You are a girl still.

Marion : Where is a glass? I want to look at myself. There used to be one over the fireplace. Never mind, there's sure to be one in the bedroom.

Dale : Don't bother about a glass, Marion. Come and see the garden.

Marion : I must be dreadfully changed in 25 years.

Dale : You have hardly changed at all.

Marion : Then why don't you want me to look in the glass ?

Dale : Because you've seen enough changes in one day. You have changed a little, of course. Your hair is grey ; it suits you wonderfully well. And there are one or two wrinkles. But your eyes are just the same. Do you remember how I used to kiss you on the eyelids ?

Marion : They can't be the same, they must have grown faded. I don't think I'll go and see.

Dale : Don't bother about it, dearest. You still have the sweetest face in all the world. Sit down, now. You mustn't stand too long.

(She sits.)

Marion : If I'm going away, I must pack.

Dale : The nurse is doing that for you.

Marion : But she won't know what to take.—Oh ! I suppose she'll know better than I do. (Sits) Who chose this dress ?

Dale : I have always liked you in grey.

Marion : It's quite pretty. But what a strange new fashion. Tell me, what became of the rest of my trousseau ? I never even wore some of those dresses.

Dale : I expect they would seem a little old fashioned now.

Marion : I suppose so. It's a lifetime ago.
Oh, dear ! and no one remembers how nice I used to look in that lilac poplin.

Dale : I do. I'll never forget. You wore it the day we went down to your grandmother's.

Marion : I believe you really are John !—I know I'm silly, but it seems as though that person who used to be me is so dead and forgotten.

Dale : So is the person who used to be me. Only you can remember me at 25. I'm a middle aged man to the rest of the world.

Marion : How old are you ? Wait, I can tell you. 25 and 27. You must be 52 !—Where is the doctor taking me ?

I suppose it doesn't much matter.

Dale : Down to the sea. You always liked that, didn't you ?

Marion : But it can't be you that sat beside me on the pier that time the wave splashed over us. I can't believe it.

Dale : Well, it was you that would insist on talking all the time I tried to fish.

Marion : (Smiling) People shouldn't fish on their honeymoon. I told you that. John, what's that little cup on the mantelpiece ?

Dale : (Bringing her the cup) Don't you remember it ?

Marion : Yes, it's the little Chinese cup I used to say brought me luck.

Dale : I've treasured it most carefully. The saucer got broken.

Marion : You remember, we drank out of it together the day we were engaged. It didn't bring us any luck.

Dale : No. I think we ought to smash it, don't you ?

Marion : Oh, no. I think it looks homelike. I'm glad you've kept it. Is there anything else ?

Dale : That old clock. You remember ? it stood in our first little hall.

Marion : Yes. It must be very old now. I wonder it still goes.

(She opens the door of the clock and stares at the works, before turning round to say :)

John !—if it is John.

Dale : Yes, Marion.

Marion : That was a very sweet little house, wasn't it, where this clock stood in the hall ?

Dale : I have never cared about any house since.

Marion : John ! do you remember all the schemes we planned in those days ? Have you done any of the great things you were going to do ?

Dale : No. There has been so little time.

Marion : In 25 years ! what have you done all this time ?

Dale : Just worked

Marion : Going down to the office every day ?

Dale : Yes. (Sitting beside her) Very few people do carry out the dreams of their youth, Marion. I have

indeed grown older than you. I am disenchanted and disillusioned—

Marion : But you still think that my eyes are bright, John?

Dale : They are beautiful eyes.

Marion : They are faded and dim, I know they are. But you think they are beautiful. You can't be quite disillusioned. You may kiss me on the eyelids, if you like.

(He kisses her. Jack comes in.)

Jack : I'm sorry.

Marion : Here's Jack! John, isn't he big? I can't get used to having a son.

Jack : I think I shall like having a mother. Look here. I want to show you something.

(Produces a photograph.)

What do you think of that?

Marion : Who is it?

Jack : It's the girl I'm engaged to. Phyllis, her name is. It's not a good photograph. She's much prettier than that.

Marion : The girl you're engaged to?

Jack : Yes. What's the matter?

Marion : How old is she?

Jack : Just 21. Don't you think her at all pretty?

Marion : Yes, very pretty. But my son going to be married. John, isn't it dreadful? It makes me almost a grandmother!—Oh! there may be babies. I should so love a baby to hold. It would make up a little for never having had you. She's very pretty, Jack. But what will she be in 25 years' time?

Jack : What does that matter? We'll both be old then.

Dale : She's a dear little girl, Marion. You'll like her.

Marion : I'm sure I'll like her. Don't mind what I said, Jack. I havn't got used yet to being one of the last generation.

Jack : She'll be awfully glad to hear about you.

Marion : Will she? (Looks at Dale standing apart.) Jack, it must have been very sad for your father to have had me like that all these years, and he growing old by himself. It was much worse than if I had died. Have you been good to him?

Jack : I don't know.
Marion : John !
Dale : Yes ?
Marion : Poor John ! They will grow old together. It would have been so different for us if we could have grown old together, wouldn't it ?

(The door opens, and the physician enters).

Physician: Well, Mrs. Dale : Are you ready to come away with me ?
Marion : No !
Jack : She's not quite ready, sir. Won't you wait a little ?
Physician: No, I cannot wait. I have a cab at the door. I have stayed in this place as long as I can endure it, and I must be on. Mrs. Dale, will you get your hat ?
Marion : Why must I go, John ?
Dale : Don't you think that a change would do you good ? Wouldn't you like to be away from us all till you get used to what has happened ?
Marion : No, I wouldn't.
Jack : You'll be much too early for the Cape train, doctor.
Physician: I cannot wait any longer. I must be up and on. Movement !—that is what one needs ; movement. You had better come with me, Mrs. Dale. New scenes will distract your eyes.
Jack : You don't want to go, do you, mother ? Stay here with us. We'll make you happy, all right.
Marion : I can't go. I can't leave John. Look how old he is. And time runs by so quickly, he may soon be dead.
Dale : Stay with me, Marion.
Marion : Yes, I will.
Physician: Stay if you wish, but I must be on. I will speak to the nurse first. Come with me, young man.

(Jack and the physician go out to the right)

Dale : You are beginning to recognise me, Marion. You are beginning to see in me the John who sat by your side, under the poplars, all those long years ago.
Marion : Yes ! do yon remember that day ? All the birds were singing !
Dale : You see, I am not changed. It is only my body that has grown old, and changed, and within I am the

same John that you used to know—and love. Just as you are the same Marion. Believe it, dear

Marion: I do believe it. I see now. And it doesn't so much matter since we've got each other. But, oh! I feel so young inside.

Dale So do I.

Marion: Do you! Then we're the same age, really. But, John, it seems only yesterday that we were married, and now our son is going to be married, and we are old.

Dale: Not old, but getting old. The years slip by so rapidly that one hardly sees how they go.

Marion: And we are old, in a young world.

(The physician, stands unperceived in the doorway, bursts into a loud ironic peal of laughter.)

Dale: How dare you laugh?

Physician: Nay, who are you that dare to say "dare" to me? My age gives me the right to laugh at you, so doth my knowledge, and so doth my torment.

Marion: Who is he, John?

Dale: I don't know. A specialist, a wandering physician—

Marion: No. He's something other than that, something more—

Dale: Who are you?

Physician: I am the Wandering Jew, condemned to wander for ever through the world, without hope of death, because I mocked at the Man they crucified. But do not dare to pity me! I, and my punishment, are altogether beyond the sphere of your understanding. How old did you say you were?

Dale: Fifty-two.

Physician: Fifty-two, against a background of eternity? And you talk of age! Why, even I, with my two thousand years, am but a child in His sight Whom I have offended. You are His babes. Fifty-two little years! Be thankful for your blank and dawning minds. You are fools, all fools, you generations of children that slip past me. And I—I have my doom to carry along with me. Fare you well.

(He goes out of the street door. John and Marion stand looking at one another.)

The curtain falls.

MARAH.

PERSONS:

A WOMAN.
LOVE.
THE OTHER WOMAN.
EDWY (her little son).
DIMPLES
PIPKIN
CHUBBY
BLUE-EYES
CURLY-BOY
} Children.
TWO ROBINS

SCENE: The interior of a woman's heart.

SCENE: A small bare chamber of rugged stone, gloomy and neglected. In the middle of the back wall is a stongly-built door. The scanty furniture is roughly made, and in keeping with the room: a cupboard with shelves, a table, and two chairs. A portrait of a man, set curiously into the wall, hangs to the right of the door. In front, a little to the left, (as you look at the room), a woman sits beside the table, in a very dejected attitude. Her dark dress is ragged and slovenly; her hair, loose and unkempt. One of her hands, with which she has been supporting her head, falls to the table. She raises it, looks at the dust which her fingers have taken up, and brushes it off with the other hand.

The woman : Dust, everywhere dust. It must be a long time since the place was cleaned or cared for. What does it matter, since I do not care? I suppose that I might try to clean it a little. But why should I? What's the use? At least, I will dust his portrait.

(She picks up a duster from the floor, goes to the portrait, and dusts it.)

It is good for me to recall your features now and then. It reminds me of the fool I was. Oh! the fool that you made of me!

Yes, I keep your portrait dusted, but I do it with a bitterness and hardness which even you might feel if you could know. . . . There is nothing else in my heart that I need clean or care for. *You* cleared everything out, when you first came.

(She throws the duster down.)

The dust on the walls and floor, may lie there still. It was well watered with my tears in the days when I could weep. (Shivering) How cold it is! Methinks it grows colder and darker from day to day.

(She sits at the table again. After a moment, the heavy door at the back begins slowly to open, a light shining into the room through the aperture. As it opens, it shows a tangle of thorny briars, and Love standing on the threshold—a radiant, winged young creature, in a rose coloured garment, with a bright light shining about him.)

Love : Won't you let me come in?

The woman : Who are you?

Love : I am Love.

The woman : There's no place for you here. It was you that hurt me.

(She shuts the door, and shoots a heavy bolt, but as soon as she has turned away, the door flies open.)

Love : It's no use to lock me out. Bolts fly open before me. But you need not be afraid that I will cross your threshold, for the air of your heart is too dank and full of hatred. It keeps me out.

The woman ; Then why do you hold open my door and let this glaring light come in?

Love : Do you not love the light? It would drive away your darkness. Look how radiant is the outside world!

The woman : I know that brilliance, and how false it is. My own walls are bright outside.

Love : I can do nothing for you if you will not let me. . . . Don't you know that there should be no place closed to me? least of all the place where sorrow is.

The woman : Come in if you wish. I remember that once you made rainbows in here. Either way it matters nothing. I am grown too withered and dull to care.

Love : But I cannot come in. The air of your room is black, and it hurts me.

(He puts his hand against the air of her chamber, as though it were a solid substance.)

The woman : Yes, I have known all the time that you would never come in here again. And I know whose fault it is. I know who broke your wings.

Love : You must forgive him.

The woman : Forgive! what have I left to forgive with? Do you see any streams of mercy on this rugged floor? Once flowers clustered there; once these walls were lovely; now they are bare dungeon stones. I remember it as it was, with windows open, breezes blowing through, and sunbeams shining. He wrought this change. He drove the light away.—Can't you understand? There is no question of forgiveness. He is a blight, and I am the thing he blighted; that is all.

Love : I would bring you healing waters to drink and teach you to smile again.

The woman : Never, never. You yourself have said that you cannot come here. You had better go away. As for him, I hate—

Love : Do not dare, in my presence, to say that word! Hate is the foulest of any kind of filth.

The woman : You could not say, and neither could I, which is thickest and blackest in this heart of mine: hatred or despair.

Love : Both are intolerable to me.

The woman : Then go. Leave me alone. In the world

outside I am bound to smile and talk pleasantly ; surely, in here, I may be alone with the emptiness and the dust.

Love : I would have helped you ! I would—

(He turns to go, then suddenly leans his head against the door post and weeps.)

The woman : Why do you weep ? Tears are bitter. They make the eyes ache bitterly.

(Love goes out, and the door closes behind him.)

He is a pretty boy. I remember that I thought him beautiful when I was young. Ah, well ! I must go on with my living. Life does not stop because one wishes it to do so. I wonder how long it will go on ? . . . I think I feel bodily hunger. I must eat.

(She fetches some bread, a cup, and a jug of water from the cupboard. As she fills the cup, she says) :

I remember when a spring gushed up from the floor of my cell. How the waters sparkled !

(She sits down, and drinks from the cup.)

This water tastes bitter. I wonder if it is water—or tears ? There is little savour in the bread, but what savour is there in my life ? What savour is there in any life but what fools imagine for themselves ? Surely, there must be happiness somewhere, or is every human heart a den like this ? I cannot like this bread. I think that somehow the tears must have got into that as well. Yet I cannot think why, for it's a very long time since I have wept.

(There is a knock at the door. She takes no notice at first, and the knock is repeated.)

Who is there ? Who knocks at my door ?

(The door opens, revealing a happy-looking young matron, leading a little boy by the hand.)

The other woman : May we come in ?

The woman : His wife !

The other woman : (Coming in) It's so dark in here that I can hardly see. I can't even see whether you look happy or not. I hope you are happy ?—and well ?

The woman : I go on living. That is all that we should ask for, isn't it ?

The other woman : (With a soft, happy laugh) How satirical

you are! I love people to be satirical. It's so quaint.

The woman: Do you want a chair?

(She pulls another chair to the table. The other woman sits down.)

The other woman: Thank you so much. What quaint chairs! What a quaint little dwelling altogether. I suppose it's because you're artistic that you keep it so bare? I like lots of furniture in my heart, but then I'm not artistic, only happy.

(Laughs again, and puts her arm round the boy, who nestles against her knee.)

The woman: (Sitting on the other side of the table) Are you really happy? I don't know that I believe in happiness.

The other woman: Sublimely happy.

The woman: It won't last.

The other woman: Oh, yes! it will.—(A little uneasily) I wish I could see your face. I wonder why it's so dark in here?

The woman: I suppose it's very bright where you come from?

The other woman: Oh! it's so bright outside. Everything glitters and dances in the sunshine. But I can understand that one might like it shadowed,—if, for instance, one's eyes ached. Do your eyes ever ache?

The woman: Very often.—But it is not for choice that I dwell in darkness. Someone darkened my life for me.

The other woman: Oh?—I'm very sorry.

The woman: Someone you know.

The other woman: . . . I suppose you mean my husband?

The woman: I do. There's no need for us to keep up pretences. You know it as well as I do.

The other woman: It was about this I came to-day. You see, I hoped you had forgotten and were happy, but I had a feeling that perhaps you still bore resentment against him, and while I felt this I could not be perfectly happy. We are so very happy, my husband and I. Your resentment is the only flaw in my happiness. Won't you forgive him?

The woman: I had given up believing in happiness. It

looks to me a very wonderful thing, so bright, and soft, and strange. I would not spoil it for you if I could help it—though it was won at my expense. But I do not walk through easy ways, where I can step to the right hand or the left as it pleases me. I am struggling at the bottom of a pit, and I must lie as I fall.

The other woman : You have a vivid fancy ! I suppose it's my fault that I don't understand you. Do you mean that you won't forgive my husband ?

The woman : It's not in my power. I have been broken and I can't mend myself, that is all.

The other woman : Come, little Edwy, it's time for us to go.

(She gets to the doorway, then Edwy pulls his hand from hers.)

Edwy : Mummy, I never said Doodbye to that lady.

The other woman : Say Goodbye then.

(She waits in the doorway, The woman is standing beside the table. Edwy goes up to her.)

Edwy : Doodbye !

The woman : Goodbye !

Edwy : That's not the way to say Doodbye ?

The woman : How do you say Goodbye ?

Edwy : (Holding up his arms to her.) So !

(An instant's pause, then The woman swoops down on him and crushes him in her arms, sobbing on his shoulder. The other woman comes slowly up to her. Edwy looks frightened.)

The woman : (Quelling her sobs and regarding the child.) Oh ! he has your eyes in his father's face.)

The other woman : (Hesitatingly) He's supposed to be like us both.

The woman : They should be my eyes. He should be my child—mine ! not yours.

The other woman : How can you say that ? After all, I'm his wife.

The woman : He wanted me—once.

(Drops her arms from the child, who catches his mother's hand, and pulls at it.)

Edwy : Come away, mummy. She hurted me. I'm frightened. Let's go home.

The other woman : I'm coming, Edwy.

The woman : He made me love him, he made me wait, —and then he married you.

The other woman : It was unfortunate. I really am most sorry. But you see, I was made for him, and he for me, so what else could he do ?

The woman : There was a time when he thought that I was made for him.

Edwy : (From doorway) Mummy, come with me.

The other woman : I'm coming, Edwy.

(Turns to the woman.)

The woman : You may have what you came for.

The other woman : You forgive him ? Oh, thank you, thank you. Will you kiss me ?

The woman : It's tasteless kissing a woman. Go home and kiss him.

The other woman : (In doorway) You have made me so happy. Goodbye.

The woman : Goodbye.

(Edwy looks round the doorpost. His mother takes his hand and they go out. The woman sits on the chair and hides her face, sobbing. As the other woman goes out, she shuts the door behind her, but it swings open again immediately. A flowering creeper is festooned across the doorway, beautifully framing a little glimpse of woodland. The chamber is brighter than it was. Love comes to the threshold.

Love : Now at last I can come in, if you will invite me.

The woman : Yes, come in. His wife has been here, and has gone. Did you see her ? She did not understand at all. She took my suffering for darkness. She has no kind of unhappiness herself.

Love : You are richer than she.

The woman : With my heart all black and broken ?

Love : Hush ! Wait !

The woman : (Rises from her chair then exclaims) : You have left the door open.

Love : Hush ! Do you feel nothing ?

The woman : It is very still in here.

Love : Because I have filled your room with peace. It is the stillest, most beautiful of all kinds of peace, but it comes only after desolation.

The woman : Then am I no longer desolate ?

Love : Taste of my peace, and see.

The woman : I can breathe now, freely. And yet, I hardly dare to breathe, the air is so still and heavenly. Is that the singing of birds that I hear ? or of angels ?

Love : It is a singing very good for the healing of wounds. Now take off your outer garment of rags, and I will bring you one more clean and seemly, for the light is coming back into your heart.

(He helps her off with her outer garment. She waits, while he goes through the door and brings back a plain white robe. He helps her put it on, and ties the narrow girdle round her waist.)

Love : Now coil your hair together, and let me bind it.

(She gathers it into a coil at the back of her head, and he ties it round with a ribbon.)

Love : See ! the first white crocus has sprung up amongst your stones.

(He picks it.)

Would you like it ? It smells very sweet.

The woman : (Taking it) It is the only one.

Love : It is the first.

The woman : The scent is sweet. It smells of love. I will wear it in my bosom. But what is there left for me to love ?

Love : You ask that with a whole world crying out to you for love ?

(He stretches our his arm, and the posts of the door at the back stretch apart widely, showing a broad vista of woodland, with children playing on the grass, and amongst the flowers and trees. The woman stands watching them, whilst Love withdraws a little apart, into the left-hand corner of the room. Some of the children become aware of The woman's presence. Dimples, a small girl, with her hands full of flowers, comes one step into the room, and stands staring at her.)

The woman : What are you playing with ?
Dimples : Toys.
(She comes to The woman and gives her the flowers without removing her gaze.)
Pipkin : (Skipping into the room.) I've got some toys too. You can have them.
(He gives his bunch to The woman.)
The woman : I thank you. But these are flowers, not toys.
Pipkin : No, they're toys. We picked them in the wood, and we play with them.
The woman : They are beautiful. How God must love little children, to give them His most exquisite treasures for playthings.
Pipkin : You can have them.
(He runs back to the others.)
Dimples : I've hurted my hand.
The woman : Poor little girl !
Dimples : Are you sorry 'cause I've hurted my hand ?
The woman . Yes, very sorry.
Dimples : There isn't anybody to kiss it.
The woman : Come, let me kiss it to make it well.
(She kisses the hand, then puts her arm round the child and kisses her cheek. The other children watch.)
Dimples : Yes, it's better now. You see, we're only children here, and there's no one to pick us up when we fall, and kiss us when we get hurted.
Pipkin : (From the other side.) I've hurted my hand too.
The woman : Let me kiss it—Is that better ?
Pipkin : Yes.—Thank you.
Curly-Boy : Look ! I've scratched my knee. P'ease kiss it.
(She kisses the knee. Chubby begins to cry loudly.)
The woman : What's the matter ? What's the matter, you poor little fellow ?
Chubby : I haven't hurted myself at all !
The woman : But you don't want to hurt yourself, do you ?
Chubby : I want you to kiss it and make it well.
Dimples : No, he can't be kissed if he hasn't hurt himself, can he ?

The woman : Yes, I must kiss him to make the pain in his heart well. That is the sorest kind of a pain.

(She kisses Chubby. The other children drag in some boughs and greenery, which they pile together in the middle of the room. Others trail flowering creepers across the heap. Others throw blossoms over it.)

Pipkin : We're making you a seat. Such a nice one. Are you glad 'cause we're making you a seat ?

The woman : I shall be very glad.

Blue-Eyes : That's nice. Now it will do for her.—Come and sit down on your seat !

Curly-Boy : I jus' want to put this flower in the middle.

Blue-Eyes : No, it can't go there. The seat's finished.

Curly-Boy : But I want it to go there. It's my best flower.

Blue-Eyes : No, it can't.

Curly-Boy : Yes, it will.

(He puts it down. Blue-Eyes picks it up and flings it away.)

Curly-Boy : I'll hit you.

The woman : Oh, children ! don't quarrel. There has been so much of strife in this heart of mine. I thought you were going to play happily, and make it all bright and pretty for me.

Curly-Boy : I want to put my flower there, and she won't let me !

Blue-Eyes : Very well, you can put it there.

(Curly-Boy picks it up and puts it in it's place.)

Blue-Eyes : Now come and sit on your throne.

(The woman sits on the seat, still holding Chubby.)

Dimples : No, I want to sit on your lap. You loved me first.

The woman : There's room for you, too. There's room for all of you. Children, my arms are so empty ! Crowd in close.

Dimples : Do you love us ?

The woman : Yes.

Blue-Eyes : All of us ?

The woman : Yes, all of you.

Curly-Boy : . There hasn't been anybody here to love us before. We like it—don't we, Pipkin ?

Pipkin : (Stolidly) Yes.

(Two little robins hop in from the back, chirping, and take up their stand on either side.)

Robins : Tweet ! tweet ! tweet !

Blue-Eyes : Robins, robins ! come and see. We've got a mother.

First Robin : Are you a mother !

The woman : Can't you see how the children nestle close to me ? Would they do that if I were not their mother ?

Second Robin : What a pity that she has come so late !

First Robin : You see, we have just been burying the Babes in the Wood. They were such little things, and they only died because nobody wanted them.

The woman : How pitiful.

Dimples : *She* wants us. She doesn't care how close we come. And she doesn't want us to quarrel, but to play goodly. We love her.

(She kisses The woman. So does Chubby. So do Pipkin and Curly-Boy.)

First Robin : It seems that she is really their mother.

The woman : Of course I am, for I love them.

(She kisses two of them.)

I am a most tremendous mother. All things lonely and desolate are my children.

Love : (Coming a little forward) Tell me, now, Woman with the heart that I have healed, are you content ?

The woman : Yes, I am. Not satisfied, but content.

CURTAIN.

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